

16 Collecting Materials to Recycle

Having made some decisions as to what your project is, and is not, prepared to take for recycling, the next step is to work out sources of supply, and how you are going to get the materials to the composting site.

The options

- Direct collection from households, offices, markets and so on
- Central delivery / collection point, not at the composting site
- Direct delivery to the composting site

House to house collections

Householders leave suitable materials for collection on the kerbside on regular specified days. Collections may be monthly or more frequently – especially where food waste is collected.

Benefits

- Good contact with the people supplying the materials for recycling
- Opportunities to check materials offered
- Very easy for the public
- Some projects make a charge for collecting larger volumes of material

Requirements

- Leaflet all houses in collection area – provide details of what will be taken, collection days and so on.
- Regular collection day/days – it is essential that these are kept to.
- Collection sacks – many projects provide householders with strong sacks, such as those used for feed or fertilisers, which can be reused.
- A vehicle and personnel to do the collection; most schemes use vans, cars or tractors, with trailers. An electric milk float (used by Run-a-Muck in Birmingham for example) is a very appropriate vehicle. WyeCycle use a tractor and trailer because it is cheap to run. The ultimate would be a horse and cart if you are lucky enough to have one available.

Central delivery / collection point

Materials are delivered, by the public, to a central spot, such as a recycling centre – which may be a permanent site or, perhaps, a facility that visits a village once a month or so.

Benefits

- Allows some sorting of materials before transfer to the composting site

- Where the collection site is used for other recycling, excess materials, that your project can't deal with at present, could be left to go to landfill
- More flexibility in timing of collection
- Option of stopping collection at short notice if unforeseen circumstances require it

Requirements

- Leaflet all houses in collection area.
- Good clear signs – so correct materials are left, and in the right places
- Cooperation with existing site managers
- Lift sharing should be encouraged
- Vehicle to take material to the composting site
- Regular collection of materials from collection site

Direct delivery to composting site

Materials are delivered to the composting site by the general public.

Benefits

- Vehicle and personnel for collection not needed
- Shows public what is happening to their contributions
- Customers can collect compost at the same time as delivering composting materials

Requirements

- Leaflet all houses in collection area
- Site security so unwanted materials are not dumped on site
- Specific times for delivery, or open all hours
- All weather access, parking and turning for vehicles delivering to the site
- Well signed reception area so appropriate materials are left in the correct places
- Provision for dealing with excess and unwanted materials

Other options

A good publicity stunt would be to get people to deliver their Christmas trees to a site where a shredder is set up. In the autumn, councils may deliver lorry loads of leaves, or a specific leaf collection week could be organised to collect autumn leaves from the district.

Reception and storage

When the composting materials arrive at the final composting site they should not be put straight onto the compost heaps, especially by people who are unfamiliar with the process. Space will be needed to sort the materials and to store them temporarily – preferably in well-labelled areas. Hard standing is preferable as it can easily be swept clean. It should be accessible in all weathers.

Dry, tougher materials that are slow to decay can be heaped up in the open. They can be stored for some time, and are useful to have on hand to mix with wetter ingredients. Keep materials to be shredded separately.

Grass mowings, vegetable scraps and other items that are quick to rot should not be stored long as they will rapidly turn into a slimy mess. Keep them covered and / or mix with drier items

Quality control

A project may stand or fall on the quality of the products it produces. If customers are confident that compost is free of weed seeds, perennial weeds, plant diseases and other contaminants they are much more likely to use it! A Project without customers has no future – so quality control is essential.

- Publicity leaflets should state clearly the reasons for only supplying the items requested. What you take will depend on how confident you are in your composting
- Talk to people when collecting materials to reinforce the message
- Check incoming materials as early in the process as you can – on the doorstep or at the delivery site
- Hot composting (see *Making Compost 1*) should deal with the majority of weeds and plant diseases

Other relevant cards

- What Can We Compost?
- PR & Marketing
- Making Compost 1
- Case Studies