



Composting in the Community

A short history

How far back do we see references to composting? As the first empire to implement a functional bureaucracy, the Akkadians in Mesopotamia kept records by scrawling cuneiform onto clay tablets. Some of these tablets, from King Sargon's reign around 2300 B.C., are believed to include the earliest written reference to compost.

The application of reclaimed organic material to farmed fields dates to at least the Stone Age. Archaeological evidence from the British Isles suggests that Scots improved their small-scale farms with compost as far back as 12,000 years ago. These early farmers likely ploughed and seeded compost heaps *in situ*; instead of moving compost into fields, they turned the heaps into plots and planted directly in them.

Composting has been the basis of organic gardening and farming since the days of Sir Albert Howard, father of the organic method. Between 1905 and 1934 he devised the Indore method of compost making, in which materials are layered sandwich fashion, then are turned (or mixed by earthworms) during decomposition.

The **Composting in the Community network** has emerged in a similar way to the now defunct Community Composting Network (CCN), formed in 1997 and incorporated in 2003, as a grass-roots movement to share information, learning, experience and act as a mechanism to effect change. CCN was the UK-wide organisation that supported and promoted community groups, social enterprises and individuals involved in producing compost from green/food waste and using it in their local communities. The CCN met the needs of groups that were collecting and composting green waste, often before local authorities started kerbside collections. CCN was formed by a partnership of national and local groups, and over time developed some of the resources on this website, and training courses. With kerbside collections increasing and government unwilling to support CCN, in 2016 the Community Composting Network was merged with the organisation now known as Social Farms & Gardens (SF&G). The CCN website was archived.



There is now a renewed interest in both composting in general and the potential for communal composting, in part driven by actions needed to address climate change, raised profile of the effects of climate and food, government consultations, and general increased public awareness of these issues. A group of experienced practitioners came together to explore how they could best share information and experience and help capitalise interest in putting composting irreversibly in people's minds, and government action and support. It was decided to form this network and develop the resources, advice, and campaigning needed to effect positive change.