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Dumfries and Galloway Community Composting site visit report

By Propagate Scotland CIC

With thanks to the Scottish Community Alliance's fund for a Community Learning Exchange local residents of Dumfries and Galloway (D&G) visited community composting sites in East Renfrewshire and Glasgow on Friday 5th September 2025.

D&G Communities represented included: Moniaive, Gatehouse of Fleet, Whithorn and surrounding areas, and Lockerbie!

Our aims were:

- Increased knowledge and understanding of how a community compost system can be set up, physically. How to source and store 'browns' (woodchip/shredded paper etc). We will see more than one type of tumbler composter in order to ascertain criteria for what kind of composter and shelter to purchase or build ourselves.
- Increased knowledge and understanding of the social organisation of a community fridge and community compost system - number and roles of volunteers and what commitment is required. Maintaining site security.
- Increased knowledge and understanding about composting in a community setting. How to deal with questions which have arisen in our communities and with regards to legislation, such as whether we can take animal products (Eggshells? Meat? Commercial food waste?), how to prevent rats, smell, flies and where to mature the compost.

In the end we visited 3 sites:

1. Neilston - Blether and Incredible Edible Neilston Community Compost
2. St Angela's primary school
3. Woodlands Community Garden

These were selected as giving 3 quite different perspectives - a very open community resource using Jora contained unit composters, a school also using Jora, and a Ridan composter in a community garden.

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1. Incredible Edible Neilston (IEN)



Our host was Cat Train

System: Public site, cars can drive right up to the front. There are two hot composters made by Jora under a roof (open shed). These are next to the planter and herb beds, which is fantastic to put the made compost on. There is one cold composter for maturation, although they said they would ideally have 2 (but there isn't space until the council remove something). Each Jora has 2 bays, there are 2 Joras so there are 4 bays. Each bay is locked with a combination or a key lock. Ideally the combination lock would be the one that people are to add to currently, and the other 3 would be key locks, to prevent people adding to the wrong bay. The roof protects the Jora's from the sun and rain, makes it more comfortable to tend to the compost, and is used to collect water which can be used in the maturation bay and on the raised beds.

Joras in the UK are often bought from Tom who is a compost expert who lives in Lewes (Sussex). Tom designed the shed, and the builders of the local school (who needed to give back to the community) built it following his specifications.

Note that the paving slabs prevent the Jora's from sinking into the soil, so are necessary. Below is a picture of the site with measurements.



Leachate can come out of the Jora. Incredible Edible Neilston (IEN) store browns (woodchip) under the Jora in order to catch any of this liquid, and that can go into the Jora in due course. Because it is in a public space they clean the outside of the Jora once a week.

Greens: The food waste from Blether as well as 20 household waste goes in. They say 10-14 households per bin. Blether is a community food waste project which takes whatever is being thrown out from 3 nearby supermarkets and gives it away to residents before midnight, some things can be frozen and then given out for a longer time, the rest goes into the compost system. There are a lot of small containers which need to be washed, ideally there would be a hose to clean the many little containers before recycling. Coffee grounds are known to be particularly nitrogen rich, so it is recommended not to put in more than 10% coffee grounds into the Jora (or it will melt the insulation!!). Bread does not compost well, it is designed to last! They don't put it in the Jora. IEN think that perhaps they could if they soaked it in heavy liquid greens first....? What can go in? Weeds (perennials and seeds) as long as in balance, meat, coleslaw, bones (although they won't decompose in the 3 weeks).



Bokashi- [effective micro-organisms](#) - are added to the household caddies in order to prevent smells from the household caddies (especially if they are not being emptied daily), and to the food from Blether (as sometimes there is a huge glut of food waste, and it needs to be added gradually to the Jora, the Bokashi enables this to happen without smells).

Browns: IEN generally add 50:50 greens and browns into the Jora. In the Jora they don't add cardboard because it compresses really easily and they need air for the browns. They add pine pellets (which are bought in) or woodchip, with these it can be more like 70 greens: 30 pellets. Woodchip is better as even the pine pellets compress too easily (this can make it go anaerobic). Chipped bark or woodchip is there to aerate. It will come out looking as it went in - it does not break down in the process, but that's OK as it is organic matter and will decompose eventually.

Output: It is easy to empty - just put a wheelbarrow underneath, open the door and swivel the composter around and it flops out. IEN normally put the output from the Jora into the square composter beside it. It takes 6 months to mature, this gives it the opportunity to get the best bacteria to fungi ratios. They have used the output directly from the Jora onto the Planter (the community growing beds) as a mulch and that worked fine. They leave a little to inoculate the next batch (microorganisms).

Maintenance - Cat does it all: add browns, check temperature, mix. When she firsts adds the waste she turn it five times. It is best if you add a little at a time, at least not fill it to the

maximum (halfway point) on the first day (it can go anaerobic). It is then turned once per day for 3 weeks. It never goes anaerobic for us. There's a thermometer to check the temperature. Occasionally needs water added into the maturation bay (not the Jora).

Problems: the problem for Cat has been passing it onto other people (she tends to do it all), there is so much waste from Blether.

Complaints?: Most people passing by think it is a BBQ! At first it was occasionally smelly until we got the balance of greens to brown right.

SEPA (Scottish Environmental Protection Agency) - there is a self check-list. We have an exemption certificate. Cat doesn't know whether it applies to cafe waste.

Improvements: We weigh the food that we collect for Blether, but not what goes to the composter, or what comes out. Would be good to have more details of that nature.

2. St Angela's Primary school



System - 2 Jora's (same system as Incredible Edible Neilston). Currently no roof (shed), but they want to apply for funding to get one. Several compost bays to the right for normal garden waste as well as 2 for the output of the Jora's. These maturation bays have a rat-proof mesh at the bottom and up the sides. They are made from pallet collars (things that contain pallets, you can buy them second hand {FB marketplace} and they are often used as

raised beds). When it is full you can add another layer (stacking). We noticed that it is quite high for children to add the waste, they said that one child can pull the handle down, and then another can fill it from the lower height.

There are 350 children at the school, plus 60 at nursery. The Saltire project is run by volunteers who once a fortnight do a gardening group for the kids, and once a fortnight do different activities for mental health of parents e.g. music and art therapy.

The compost team are 15 pupils in p4-7, plus the eco-committee on a rota. It is managed by a principal teacher.

It is near a locked gate, which is always locked, but access through the front of the school is never locked, so it is open to the public.

Maintenance - once a week (Tuesdays) a group of children with a teacher set up compost **six caddies** in all the places it can be collected around the playgrounds and canteen. There is no cooking on site, so there is no kitchen waste, but there is plate scrapings. At the end of break and lunch break the children and teacher collect all the caddies and empty them into the Jora mixing with browns. They log temperatures, so there is a relationship to the maths and science curriculum.

They can only manage it once a week so any food waste Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday goes to landfill.

Browns: Don't want too much dry woodchip, woodchip can be left out to get wet in the rain.

Problems?: Nothing major, there has been neglect over the summer months, there was no food waste being added, in future they would add even if just their own over the summer, maybe a Saturday gardening club.

Turning the handle - we had a go and was surprised how hard it is to turn the handle. Definitely easier when using the two sets of handles, one in front and the one to the side. Not likely to be done by a frail elderly person.

Feedback has been very positive!

3. Woodlands Community Garden



Their old system got rats. So they got funding for the Ridan plus Ridan maturation bays. No shed/cover. Members of the local community come and put their kitchen waste into the yellow bin. The staff don't really know who is all making donations! Clear signage tells residents only to put uncooked food (no bread, meat etc). Staff add the yellow bin into the Ridan on the top. They have put a bolt across the top of the Ridan to stop people adding their own waste, it is better if this is done by trained people who can keep an eye on it and make sure a good mix of browns is always added. When anyone turns the handle (easy) waste comes out directly, so there is a hole which is always open. If passers by were very enthusiastic then they could turn the handle enough to pop the food waste out into the container set underneath (see plant pot in the photo).

Note the little step to make it easier to put the food waste in.

Some of our group have concerns that rats could still get in, but we are told that is not the case (yet).

Browns: also not cardboard, woodchip is good.

Maturation bays - pretty solid and are sold separately to the main Ridan tumbler, but with the same brand. One that is full is very smelly. This could be caused by them not adding enough browns. They are new to the system and just working out the correct ratios and balance of things to add. Could also be because the container is metal so no air can get in. It is also very large.

Measurements of the Ridan system:





4. Niki's place Carsphairn

Our final stop was Niki's place in Carsphairn, where she showed us her first prototype of a D&G home-made composter made from recycled materials! Watch this space!