



What is Grow Your Own?

Growing your own is great fun, while providing you with more nutritious ingredients, reducing food miles and waste, and saving you money too. It's also a chance to promote ideas such as community composting schemes to deal with any food waste, rather than just sending it to landfill.

Running an introductory session to help people start growing will be educational and will hopefully take away any fears about it being too difficult. You might well find that people would be interested in developing what they learn further: if there is a suitable space, working with friends and neighbours on a community garden and composting project can help develop a stronger sense of community spirit and improve how everyone feels about their local area.

Why run an introductory session on growing your own / community composting?

Communities across the UK are seeing a resurgence of interest in growing food. An introductory event will encourage others to give it a go, showing how easy it is to try growing simple produce such as tomatoes or lettuces. It's not essential to have lots of space; in fact, it's amazing what's possible in a backyard or even just on a windowsill. Other kinds of one-off events could include skills workshops, planting days, seed swap events or garden visits. It all depends on the interests and needs of your community group, and the facilities you have available.

Community composting is a great natural fit with projects aiming to grow more food locally. It's the most sustainable way to deal with organic waste, turning it into a vital resource to help the growing process. Green waste from local gardens and kitchens is gathered together, taken to a designated site and rotted down into compost for use by local residents. Even composting at home for one year can save global warming gases equivalent to all the CO₂ your kettle produces annually, or your washing machine produces in 3 months
(Source: <http://www.recyclenow.com/>)

This event should take approximately 2 hours.

TOP TIP

Make links with local food banks, as any spare food grown in your neighbourhood can be passed on to those who need it.

Contact your local **allotment association** to find out what spaces exist to grow things, and what knowledge and skills are available in your community.



What things do I need?

- Decide where you are going to hold the event, inside or outside, or both
- Seeds or plants to get you started
- Examples of plants that grow well in the area (images or potted plants)
- Basic gardening tools and equipment such as trowels, gloves and watering cans
- Tubs, pots or planters, to demonstrate growing and for people to take away small plants to try themselves
- Access to a water supply
- A simple compost bin to demonstrate with, if possible
- An initial supply of compostable waste from your kitchen or garden, if possible
- A first aid kit

Running the session

Before the event:

Gathering materials

Gather together pots, plants or seeds, trowels and any other things you need. As well as these items, you will need to provide sheets to protect tables and floors and cleaning equipment. Get your volunteers to ask around for whatever can be begged or borrowed.

Managing risk

Undertake a risk assessment and ensure you implement the actions needed to reduce any risks. This should include checking any tools are fit for purpose and providing safety equipment where needed – see *Resource A for an example risk assessment*.

It is also good practice to display a disclaimer along the lines of:

“Persons taking part in this event do so at their own risk. For your own protection, please take all reasonable measures to check the condition of any tools used. [Cumbria County Council] accepts no liability for any claim or loss resulting from the event.”

But remember this will not absolve you of responsibility if you have not taken adequate steps to prevent incidents.

On the day:

1) Introductions and icebreaker – approx. 5 mins

By way of icebreaker, ask people to introduce themselves and say if they have any experience of growing plants.

2) Setting the scene – approx. 15 mins

Explain the purpose of the session, and remind people to be careful about using gardening tools, particularly in small spaces where others are close by. Demonstrate how to use tools safely and effectively. You'll need to be vigilant during the session and watch for any potential hazards.

- Start by discussing different options for growing spaces: for instance, borders in a garden or containers in a backyard.
- Then show examples of plants that grow well in your area. Plants such as strawberry and rhubarb are always a simple and popular way of giving it a go.
- Explain how to care for the plants, including watering, any need for pruning, and when you can expect a crop. What you say here will depend on the type of seed you are planting.

3) Planting seeds - approx. 20 mins

Give a demonstration of how to plant seeds, keeping it short and simple. Then get stuck into the practical task:

- Everyone takes a plant pot and part fills it with compost.
- Add seeds according to the instructions.
- Fill in with compost and water the pot.
- Write the type of plant on a label and stick onto the pot.

4) Refreshments – approx. 20 mins

5) Group discussion: composting – approx. 15 mins

- Begin by telling the group the statistics about home composting in the introduction to the guide. Outline the benefits: Plants grown in soil that is enriched with compost have stronger, healthier roots and leaves making them far less prone to pests and diseases. You will also get tastier fruit and vegetables and more robust, vibrant flowers and plants, without the need for chemical fertilizers.

- It's important to have a good mixture of materials if you want to make good quality compost so discuss what can or can't be composted at home (you might like to run this as a 'Can I compost...?' true/false game):
 - As well as green garden waste, you can compost fruit and vegetable peelings, tea bags, pet hair, and even shredded paper. Egg shells can be composted, preferably having been crushed first.
 - Try to aim for a 50/50 mix of 'greens' (vegetable peelings, old flowers, grass cuttings, spent bedding plants) and 'browns' (garden prunings, coffee grounds, tissues and paper napkins, cardboard, vacuum cleaner dust).
- Finally, say that green waste from kitchens and gardens can be composted in a range of devices and explain how to get subsidised compost bins from Cumbria County Council (See 'Further information and support' below).

6) Setting the take away challenge and group photo – approx. 5 mins

Challenge the group to create their own growing space, individually or collectively. For some this may be no bigger than a window-box but that's fine. Encourage people to take photos of their plants growing and any successful produce, to add to a group facebook page or an alternative that's appropriate to the group.

Before everyone leaves, gather them for a team photo holding their new plants!

Things to note

During the session take time to chat informally, and only work at a pace people feel comfortable with. Remember that growing together should also be a social occasion in your community. Bringing along refreshments such as flasks of tea and coffee or containers of juice will be much appreciated!

Thank any supporters who may have offered you the venue, lent equipment or donated plants to give away.

Testimonials from communities who have arranged similar sessions

We ran a half-day session on how to make best use of a small backyard, showing how to grow vegetables in patio containers and window boxes
Sharon, Barrow-in-Furness

Great news! - I've just received a free compost bin on Freegle, and have already started using it for kitchen waste
Nigel, Appleby-in-Westmorland

Further information and support

Cumbria Action for Sustainability can pass on information on local food growing groups in your local area. Contact at **01768 210276** www.cafs.org.uk

Freegle is an online organization promoting reuse and recycling through sharing spare resources. There's now a gardening category where you can offer or receive surplus garden tools, seeds and equipment, so it's a great place to find items to get you started. You can find your local Freegle group at: www.ilovefreegle.org

Community Composting Network (CCN) is the UK-wide organization that supports and promotes community groups, social enterprises and individuals involved in producing compost from green/food waste and using it in their local communities: <http://www.communitycompost.org/>

Cumbria County Council has offers on Food Waste Digesters and compost bins. Food Waste Digesters take all cooked & uncooked food waste. They start from £15 for the Green Cone and £20 for the Green Johanna.

Cumbria County Council also offers reduced priced home compost bins from as little as £11 plus delivery, available to anybody within Cumbria. There's a range of bins on offer to suit all situations:

www.greatgreensystems.com/promotions/ggscumbria

www.resourcecumbria.org/compost

www.cumbria.getcomposting.com

<http://www.recycleforcumbria.org/news/news/2012/composting.asp>