



Spotlight



The Lovat, Fort Augustus: Top tips for in-vessel composting



Creating high-quality compost from unavoidable food waste has proved a big success for The Lovat, a hotel situated in Fort Augustus. Here we share some of their top-tips for businesses that are keen to compost.

Representatives from [The Highland Community Waste Partnership \(HCWP\)](#) visited [The Lovat](#), a 4 star hotel in Fort Augustus on 23 May, as part of a factfinding mission to learn how composting can work for businesses and hospitality.

HCWP Officers from the [Highland Good Food Partnership](#), [Lochaber Environmental Group](#), [Thurso Community Development Trust](#), [Transition Black Isle](#) and [Velocity Café & Bicycle Workshop](#) were joined by representatives from the community-run [Rosemarkie Beach Café](#). The visit was made possible through connections made via [Visit Inverness Loch Ness](#).



The Lovat gardens benefit from the high-quality compost. Image supplied by Lovat Hotel.

The Lovat Manager, Caroline Kelly and Maintenance Manager, Andy Clark, were on hand to explain more about sustainable initiatives at the hotel, and the practical part composting plays. Seasonal, homegrown produce, with a low carbon footprint is high on the agenda - chefs need to walk only 20 steps to select vegetables grown in the hotel garden. And whilst there is very little food left on the plates thanks to head chef Sean Kelly's expert menu, there is still food waste produced, through peelings and other unavoidable waste. And that's where composting comes in...

Purchased in 2008, The Lovat sourced a Rocket in-vessel composter. This piece of kit enables businesses to collect their food waste, drop it into the composter - and turn it into high-quality compost within a matter of weeks.

The rewards for The Lovat in setting up and running an in-vessel composter are shown in the compost that helps grow high-quality seasonal vegetables their kitchen needs, and flowers across the grounds. It's also paid off in cost savings with little reliance on buying in compost.

Hotel Manager, Caroline, recognises the many benefits of composting - and the other sustainable initiatives undertaken at the hotel - but is keen to share that the primary reason for this approach is that it's "simply the right thing to do".



Setting up in-vessel composting might sound like a daunting task, so we are delighted to share top tips and learning from Andy and Caroline at The Lovat.

Top tip 1: If your compost is too liquid, add in woodchips. “It’s been a lot of trial and error to perfect our compost,” says Andy. “When we first started using it, there was too much liquid going into the system, this led to some very watery sludge – great for the plants, not so great for our guests as the smell was, well you can imagine.”

Top tip 2: Check and educate staff about what’s going into your machine, signage helps to keep things clear and if in doubt, keep it out. “You’ve got to be careful what you’re putting in the composter” says Andy. “Whilst meat, eggshells and the like can go in, some products which are supposed to be bio-degradable just won’t break down in the composter. Teabags for example, just don’t break down the way you want them to.”



Maintenance Manager, Andy Clark, shares top-tips on in-vessel composting. Image by HCWP.

Top tip 3: Site compost storage and riddle space (an item that sifts materials to produce finer compost) before situating the composter. “Site a space for your compost to go and before it gets put to use, riddle it through. Anything too big for the riddle can go back through your composter which will help it break down further” says Andy.

Top tip 4: Make it easy for the staff to use. Shallow food waste bins mean nothing that could break the composter ends up inside the machine such as bones, or even the odd piece of cutlery! Andy says: “A lot of it comes down to making sure the kitchen team are onboard and it’s an easy process from them. Previously we’ve used big deep containers in the kitchen for putting food waste into, but that led to the odd fork getting into the machine. So we learned from that and switched to long troughs to make sure everything going in can be seen more clearly.”

Top tip 5: Trial and error can help perfect your mix. “About three bins of food waste are taken out to the machine each day” says Andy. “The vessel is turned once every 1-2 hours which gives us a great compost mix. A higher temperature and a slower speed seems to work well for us and that’s been perfected through trial and error. We have about a 50/50 dry to wet mix ratio”

Top tip 6: Engaging with SEPA is simple. There are regulations that need to be met to compost food waste, but Caroline advised that the process had been relatively straightforward: “It’s very simple. SEPA have kept us right in the forms necessary to compost food waste”.

Find out more:

The Lovat: A 4 star hotel in Fort Augustus - www.thelovat.com

SEPA: Regulations for setting up a composter - www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/waste/composting/#six

The Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP): Led by eight community groups across the Highlands, coordinated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the HCWP is working to reduce waste in our communities by changing the way that we all consume, that is, buy, use and dispose of things. www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/highland-community-waste-partnership/