

UNWELCOME GUESTS

Billions of creatures in our home compost bins are very welcome because they turn our garden and raw kitchen waste into wonderful compost, but occasionally we spot less welcome visitors.

Luckily, there are simple ways of getting rid of these and preventing their return.

Ants: build their nests in a warm, dry sheltered place. If you have ants in your compost bin, it is too dry.

To get rid of them, empty your compost bin. If you're allergic to ant bites, use a long handled rake to spread the compost on the ground. Pour boiling water over the ants while they are rushing about.

Put your compost bin on ground that you've just soaked. Fork in the material that hasn't turned into compost yet and pour in a bucket of cold water.

To stop the ants returning, keep your bin wet: add lots of sappy

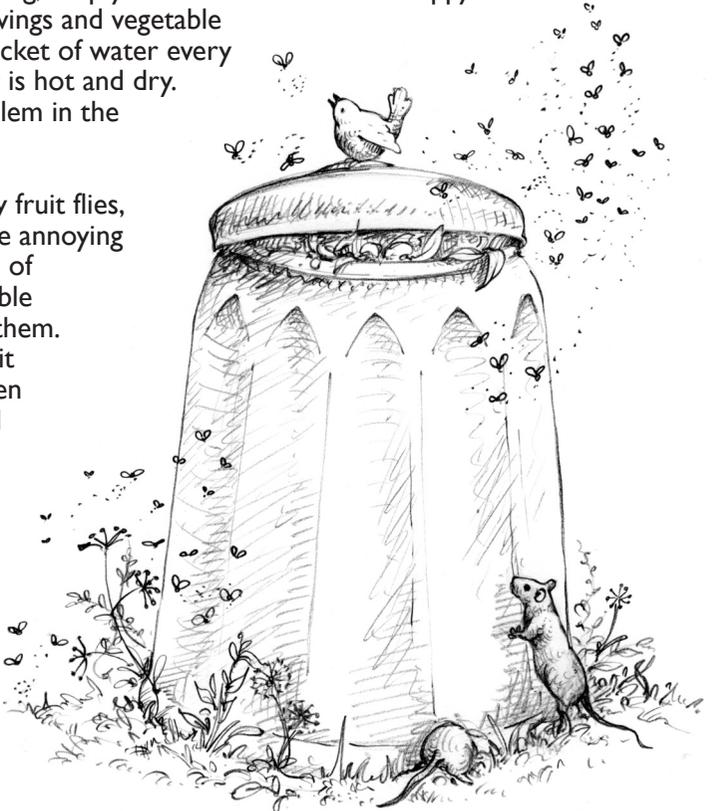
material, like grass mowings and vegetable trimmings; pour in a bucket of water every few days if the weather is hot and dry.

Ants will not be a problem in the winter.

Flies: little flies, usually fruit flies, in your compost bin are annoying but harmless. The smell of rotting fruit and vegetable waste is what attracts them.

So, if you cover this fruit with a spadeful of garden soil, the flies can't smell the rotting food waste underneath.

If you are putting in lots of fruit waste, like spoilt windfall apples, cover this immediately with dry woody material like shredded prunings or paper and some garden soil.



Mice, Voles and Shrews: Wood Mice sometimes take up residence in a compost bin; they may store grain, seeds or nuts which could germinate in your compost.

Voles eat vegetation and love to make tunnels through grass mowings. They may nibble a spiral tunnel round the outer edge of a Compostabin. To deter them, keep the bin on the wet side and create a lot of disturbance by adding, emptying or turning.

Shrews eat insects and other invertebrates and, apart from eating the odd worm, won't do any damage.

Rats can be really destructive and may carry disease. They like a warm, undisturbed, dry spot for their nests so having a soggy compost bin and a lot of disturbance will be a deterrent. If they are a bad problem, you can make a floor of double thickness wire, rabbit netting and put your compost bin on top. It is quite easy to bend the wire netting up round the sides of a small composting unit and tie it firmly round the bin 30cm above the ground. A New Zealand Box is harder to protect and you will need to firmly staple wire netting in place. Even then rats may gnaw through the wooden sides.

A few composting units are said to be rat proof, for example the Green Johanna has a thick plastic base.

Wasps: like dry, warm, quiet places to nest. Keep your bin wet by adding water in the spring when queen wasps are looking for nest sites. When you see the beginnings of a nest, break it up or, at night, puff in wasp killer. If you are allergic to wasp stings, get someone else to help but don't ignore the wasp nest – it will only get bigger.

Woodlice: like damp places, so keep your bin a bit dry to deter them. They don't like fresh, green material, preferring rotting woody stuff. They don't cause trouble but if you have a very large population in a bin you may need to empty the bin to break up their habitat.

Having the correct balance of green and brown material and emptying or turning your compost bin at least once a year will help prevent invasions and enable you to keep composting safely.

For more information on home composting or to contact us - www.askorganic.co.uk or 01450 860778

ASK Organic, in partnership with Scottish Borders Council, has a Home Composting Display within Woodside Plant Centre, by Ancrum, Jedburgh.



**Waste Aware
Scottish Borders**

For information on Waste and Recycling contact Scottish Borders Council Recycling Team on 0300 100 1800 or www.scotborders.gov.uk/recycling

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