



---

# Composting case study - Growing with Grace

---

**Organisation:** Growing with Grace  
**Name:** Neil Marshall  
**Address:** Clapham Nursery  
Clapham  
Lancaster  
LA2 8ER

**T:** 015242 51723.  
**E** [info@growingwithgrace.co.uk](mailto:info@growingwithgrace.co.uk)  
**W:** [www.growingwithgrace.co.uk](http://www.growingwithgrace.co.uk)



**Size of business:**  
0.9ha of green house (2ac)

**Short history:**

The co-operative was formed in November 2000 by a group of five local people (mainly Quakers) with a vision of an alternative way of business based on sustainability, equitable employment, workplace spirituality and fair-trade. Organic status was achieved in February 2001. They are certified by the Soil Association to produce and pack organic produce. At present, they deliver approximately 400 vegetable bags in the locality.

**Choice of type of business activities undertaken:**

- A greenhouse growing operation
- An organic shop
- A box scheme 250 deliveries per week
- Compost production (10 tonnes per week)

**Sustainable agriculture:**

Centred on 0.9ha of greenhouses at the edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, this unique operation is a valuable organic production resource. Based on an ethos of 'local food for local people'

the greenhouses help fill the hungry-gap by extending the growing season. The Organic Shop and home delivery bag scheme supply a range of organic vegetables, fruit and dry goods.

**What type of compost were you buying in and using previously?**

“Previously we did not use compost, although we did use green manures.”

**Why have you decided to make your own compost? What did you intend to use it for? What are the benefits?**

“We needed an input and we had no outdoor growing areas to provide us with a material to turn into compost. Our weeds and vegetable waste are not sufficient. Greenhouse requirements are greater than outdoor growing. The intention was to build fertility. The soil was fairly dead. We were really interested in the bacterial and fungal additions that come with compost and their ability to move the nutrients about. It is early days but we feel that the onions have already benefited and mulching round the lettuces has also been effective. With everything else it is a matter of time but we feel that overtime we will see the cumulative benefits.”

**What feedstock do you use and where do you obtain it?**

“Garden waste from a doorstep collection scheme collected by Craven district council since last July.”

**Did you have any support from other organisations to establish your composting operation?**

“We have a close relationship with the local council in the seeking of the grants and the continuous delivery of the service. We obtained funding from the European Union (ERDF), New Opportunities Fund (SEED programme) and the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust. The composting operation started with a feasibility study that was paid for by the grants. Bob Baars of ECOSTA carried out the feasibility study.”

**What method of composting do you use?**

“The green garden waste is delivered once a week by the council in a specially designed truck. It is shredded on site and a skid steer loader is used for loading, as well as forming the windrows in the polytunnels. We then monitor the temperatures and carbon dioxide levels with a specialist thermometer and a CO<sub>2</sub> probe. When the temperature goes above 65°C we turn it. This requires frequent turning for the first 10 to 14 days and we do find that it is difficult to keep temperatures down. We use a mini-Sandberger turner as we do not have sufficient space to have a tractor. Once the temperature has stabilised we leave the compost to mature. After 6 to 8 weeks the process is complete and we transfer it to the polytunnels.”

**How do you use it?**

“We use it as a soil conditioner and, in some cases, as a mulch. If we did not produce it ourselves we would definitely have to buy it in. Producing our own compost saves us considerable amounts of money.”

**Did you need to buy any specialist equipment? What equipment do you use and why?**

“We use the mini-Sandburger turner and an additional small tractor to generate power for the turner. We also use a shredding machine and a skid steer front loader.”

**What have been the biggest obstacles to producing your own compost?**

“The grant application process is a minefield. The support we have had from the council has been wonderful. There are many safeguards that you need to be aware of and it is worth baring in mind that the requirements for grant applications vary enormously. It takes you in to a different ball game – suddenly we are answerable to other organisations.

Teething problems with the machinery have been an issue but now producing compost is an integral part of our systems. The pros are that we have a good material to put in the greenhouses.”

**What techniques have you employed for avoiding waste creation?**

“Waste is kept to a minimum by reusing the veg bags. Cardboard goes to a mill to be turned back into paper or card.”

**Do you have any tips for those thinking of starting their own composting operations ?**

“Do not underestimate the time needed to deal with the grant bodies and the subsequent reports that they require. Make sure you build the financing of that time into your application – factor in these costs!”

This case study was produced as part of the Soil Association waste minimisation project funded by the RMC Community Fund and Marks and Spencer.

**The Food and Farming Department**

T: 0117 914 2400

F: 0117 314 5001

E: [ff@soilassociation.org](mailto:ff@soilassociation.org)

W: [www.soilassociation.org/foodandfarming](http://www.soilassociation.org/foodandfarming)

**Soil Association** Campaigning for organic food and farming and sustainable forestry

Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6BY

T: 0117 929 0661 F: 0117 925 2504 E: [info@soilassociation.org](mailto:info@soilassociation.org)

[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

Version .1 Approved: