

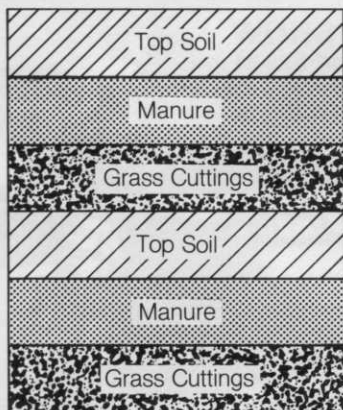
John Lowry's recipe for Quality Compost

Talk to John Lowery, the Course Manager at Ringway Golf Club, a runway or two from Manchester Airport and it will not be long before the conversation turns to his favourite subject - compost making.

John has been producing his own compost for many years and like the amateur wine buff it is a continuous process, whilst using the matured stuff, there are several other heaps fermenting away. The period is about the same time too, three to four years for a vintage brew.

The quantity used over a season at Ringway is 30-40 tons and a greenkeeper will need a fair area of suitable space to make up at least three separate heaps. The ingredients are simply good quality topsoil, grass cuttings and farmyard manure, laid in 12 inch layers and topped by 15 inches of top soil.

But let John describe how he builds the heaps between 5-6 feet high, but with settlement reduces quickly to around 4 feet as the rotting process accelerates.



"My grass cuttings are collected from heaps which I site in various hidden areas around the course. Copses and behind hedges are ideal sites, but you must also have access for collection. All grass boxes are emptied on them whether it is the GM3 from greens or 180 on tees. We never tip weed from bunker work, just clean cuttings. I did try leaves in the early days, but sometimes you could break down a heap after 4 years and leaves, like beech, ash and oak would still be intact! I have found a good local farmer who stores fresh manure for me and delivers it the following year, so by the delivery time the rotting down is well under way. He recently put up the price by £10 per 20 ton load and when I enquired about the price rise, he said feed had gone up and it was costing more to produce "the end" product!

I find the manure layer on top of the cuttings accelerates the rotting down process and the top soil gives body to the whole thing.

We now have a mature heap to put under cover - What do we require? A drying shed - nothing too elaborate. It is amazing what can be achieved with clear plastic sheeting, and 3'x2' framework supported by 8 posts, open all round or just at each end. The important point is a free circulation of air. My shed is an old corrugated barn bought for £50 and erected by a couple of members and myself over odd weekends. These sheds can also provide extra working areas during wet weather.

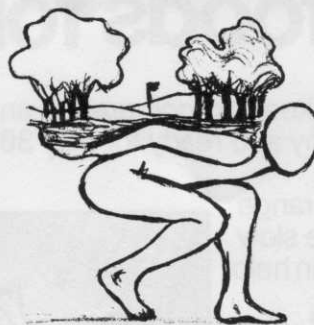
I use the Royer belt-type crusher to break down the material prior to riddling. For riddling I have the En-Tout-Cas rotary with Villiers engine. There is no waste from compost as all the coarse riddlings left over make super tee and shrub planting material with a very high food content. It also makes a good open rough layer on drain trenches prior to relaying the turf, allowing water through and providing a good rooting base. Better than sand and most top soils, considering the average bag of planting compost costs between £2-3. Another saving!

Labour is our next consideration. I found by utilising my labour, on wet days, instead of sitting in the shed or carrying out futile tasks we could produce 10 cwt. of compost. We all have those "in-between job" spells - times not to be idle - it all adds up and it saves your club money.

The most important aspect of making your own compost is you control the quality - like life you reap what you sow. A rough estimate of making your own material, I would say costs around £3 to £4,000 for the crusher, riddle and a cheap storage shed. Remember you have many years of cheap compost for that first capital outlay".

Quality compost for greens and tees, dependent on the transport charges and the availability costs around £20.00-£25.00 a ton. According to the figures calculated by John Lowery a considerable saving can be shown with the home-made variety. Including greenkeepers' time, purchase of manure, top soil, fuel and running costs of the machinery we can produce proven quality compost for £7.75 a ton, with a result saving to his club of about £400 a year. What is more it is there when he wants it and he is certain he could not buy better.

TECHNICAL 1



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