

December 2017: Your Bumper Christmas Issue - The Bean Trial Verdict Is In



The beans await their fate.

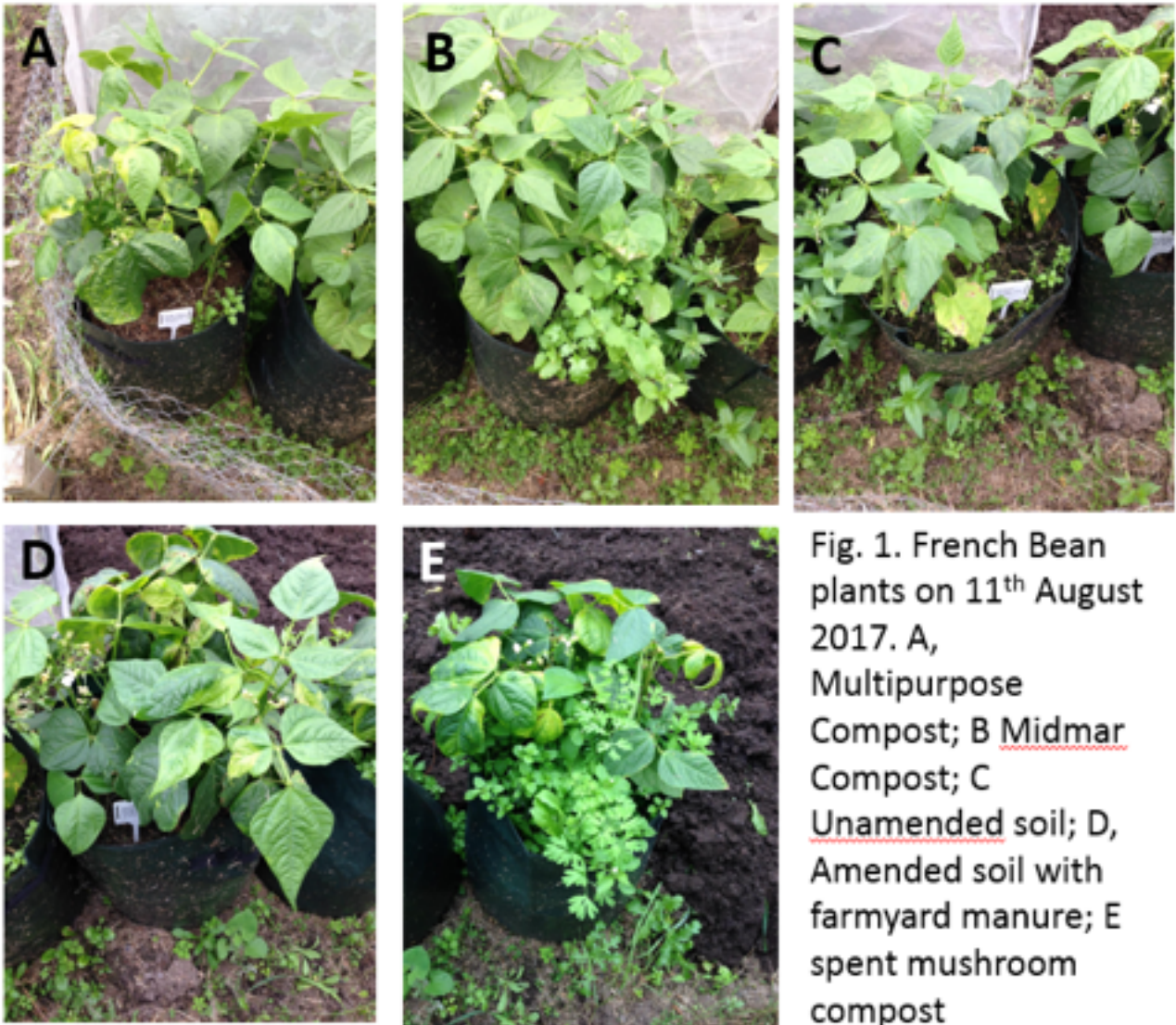
Home grown compost beats the stuff you buy in bags



John Grace's report of a compost trial at Midmar

Most of us buy garden compost in its many guises. We are easily persuaded by the colourful illustrations and promises of crops-to-be on the bag, not to mention the convenience and ease-of-handling. However, the packaging rarely states the chemical and physical composition of the material inside and even if it did, few people have the technical knowledge to interpret the information. There is of course, an alternative – simply make your own compost by recycling the plant material that you have grown yourself. Many plot-holders already do,

and some FEDAGA sites have installed communal composting. In this article we explore the effectiveness of home-grown compost versus examples of commercially-available compost. We used dwarf French Beans for this trial as they are among the most demanding of subjects.



Methods

Dwarf French Bean ‘The Prince’ was sown on 19.04.17 using seed compost in root trainers in an unheated greenhouse. In late May the experiment began: three seedlings were planted out into each of five growing bags (35 x 45 cm) containing five different growth media:

A, Multipurpose Compost from Garden Solutions

B, Midmar Compost, from long-established compost heap

C, Unamended soil from my Midmar plot

D, Amended soil from my Midmar plot, soil mixed (50:50) with Farmyard Manure from Garden Solutions

E, Spent mushroom compost

The growing bags were placed outdoors at the Midmar allotment site, and beans were harvested and weighed periodically. No irrigation was

necessary (it was a wet summer). The only intervention was occasional weeding.

Results

All plants established well, but those on mushroom compost began to wither even before any beans were ready. As time went on, all plants showed some yellowing but those in Multipurpose Compost and Midmar Compost remained relatively healthy-looking (Fig 1). Plants growing on Mushroom Compost and Amended Soil produced notably fewer leaves, but the leaves they produced were somewhat larger and often a darker shade of green. However, they died back later.

Bean production varied substantially. Plants growing in Midmar Compost yielded far more beans than any other treatment (Fig 2). They produced 573 g of beans, more than double that of the next best which was Multipurpose Compost from Garden Solutions. It produced only 205 g. (Fig 2). Unamended Midmar soil was particularly poor, lagging behind the other treatments until the end of the experiment when it outperformed the mushroom compost by just a few grams.

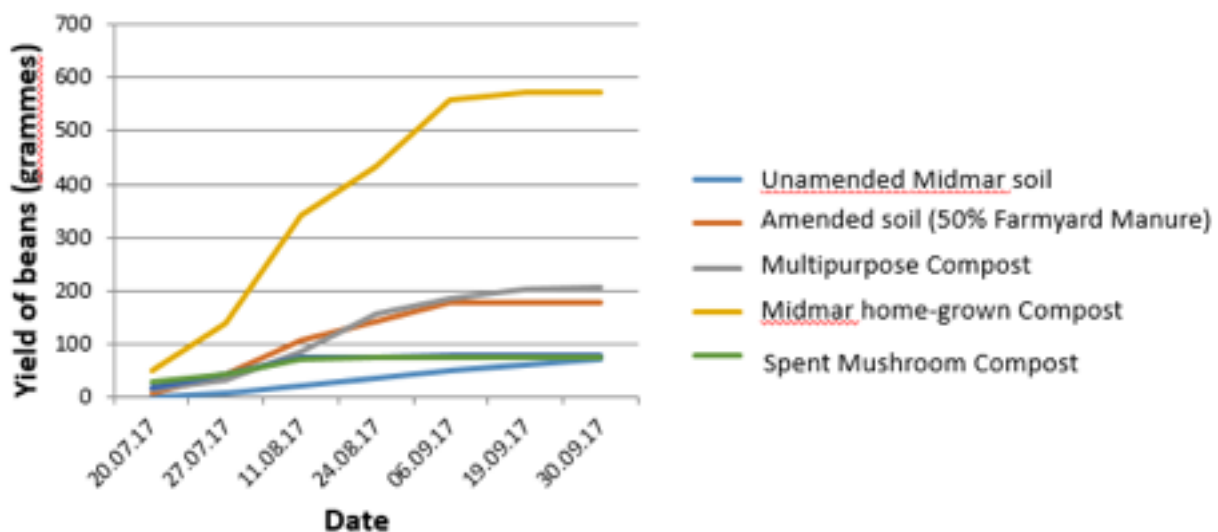


Fig. 2. Accumulated yield of beans. By mid-September There was no further production, and the plants began to die back.

Discussion

We expected that home-grown compost might be the best, but we were surprised that it outperformed all the other growth media by such a large margin. At the other extreme, unamended soil was poorer than we imagined it would be, despite having proved itself in previous years by producing good crops.

It is important to emphasise that this compost came from a communal compost heap that was established many years ago, and from near the bottom of the pile. It was not just 'well-rotted' but completely rotted to

make a fine soil. Some plot-holders avoid using communal compost, fearing that the compost may harbor weeds and plant diseases. For this reason, and because of the difficulty in managing the compost bins, we've discontinued the Midmar communal composting project. It's best to have your own compost bins, following the RHS advice that's available via the FEDAGA web site: click [here](#).

Why do we think home-grown compost works so well? Dead leaves contain all the essential elements that plants need from the soil, and roughly in the right proportions. The elements that plants are especially hungry for ('macronutrients') are:

nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulphur and magnesium.

But there are even more elements needed for plant growth, but only in tiny amounts ('micronutrients'). They include:

iron, boron, chlorine, manganese, zinc, copper, molybdenum.

As well as containing all of these, home-made compost has living micro-organisms (fungi and bacteria), many of which are beneficial to plants. A bag of commercially-sourced compost is also derived from decomposed plant material, but may not have the right proportions, or the right quantities of nutrients, and is biologically dead (it's been sterilized to kill the weeds, and most fungi and bacteria are killed by this treatment).

This was only a small trial, and we shouldn't read too much into the results until it can be replicated in other locations. Does any one else want to help me extend this study, perhaps using other materials including sea-weed?

(You can contact John [here](#).)

RockDust: Great Savings Just Got Better

REMIN

SOIL AND COMPOST REMINERALISER

VOLCANIC ROCK DUST

Last month FEDAGA advertised an unbeatable discount on bulk purchases of Rockdust for allotment sites. Two sites that we know of have each ordered up a pallet of 49 x 20kg bags for their members.

Since then we've been told:

REMIN are having a 20% off sale up to the end of January. Instead of the published £378 for a 49 x 20kg bag pallet, the price is **£295**. This

makes the price per 20kg bag just a couple of pence over £6. Normal retail is £13.99. A great saving just got better.

Click [here](#) to read testimonials from those who know. Bear in mind that your allotment plot may be exhausted and in need of a pick-me-up.

"The yield of the crop is limited by the nutrient in shortest supply".
Justus Von Liebig (1803-1873; agricultural and biological chemist and founder of organic chemistry).

If your site would like to participate, suggest it to your committee or organise it yourself. You have until 1st January 2018 to get your order in. Send it to remin@fedaga.org.uk. Put that fertility back in your soil!



Guiding The Government



Judy Wilkinson of SAGS writes:

Thank you very much if you sent in a response to the Scottish Government Consultation on '**Guidance on the functions of local authorities under the new legislation on allotments**' [or Part 9].

SAGS is very pleased that there were over 250 responses which is very good for a rather esoteric area of legislation that is not sexy or 'flavour of the month'.

What happens now? The Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham has signed a Commencement Order that will bring into force the powers necessary to make the compensation regulations. Once signed, there is then a duty placed on the Scottish Government to lay the Commencement and Consequential Orders for the implementation package for Part 9 before Parliament, probably in week commencing 18 December. Then Parliamentary Scrutiny of the package can take up to four months after that.

The Guidance is not ready at the same time as the Commencement Order since it is still to be written. Legally, the committee does not require sight of a draft guidance document although it would have been ideal to make this available and published simultaneous to laying the wider Part 9 implementation package before Parliament. However it was agreed by the Tri-partite Group that Part 9 should be moved forward (the Act was passed in 2015) so it will soon be in force across Scotland and the clock can start ticking for the local authorities to implement their duties.

It is hoped that the draft Guidance will be ready to send to the Parliamentary Scrutiny panel when they discuss the rest of the package in the spring.

The process has been delayed because the procurement exercise to instruct an independent consultant to write the report on the Consultation is taking longer than expected. A final analysis report should be available in January 2018. Then the draft Guidance will be written as soon as possible after that. The Tri-partite Group has been assured that the Guidance will be strong, robust, relevant and designed in collaboration with the Group, taking into account the responses to the Consultation.

Thank you all for participating in this. Your input has ensured the Scottish Government is working with the Tri-partite Group as envisaged in the recommendations about the new legislation on allotments.

The Guidance from Scottish Government concentrates on the functions of the local authorities. SAGS is writing a series of booklets

'Galvanising the Grass Roots' to support the intention of the Act and all those involved with realising new sites and supporting existing ones. The first 'Grow Your Own Allotment Site' for the creation of new sites is on the SAGS website (click [here](#)). The second on Governance and the

third on Planning will be launched at the Annual Allotments Conference on June 16th in Dunblane.

Council Allotment Rents: Up Again

A casual chat with the Council's Allotment Officer whilst on his rounds last month unearthed the news that rent for a full plot will rise to £106 next year.

FEDAGA is wondering, had this topic not been chanced upon, just when would the Council have decided to alert us to its intentions in this area?

Some Snippets From Around The Sites



FEDAGA regularly liaises with the Council Allotment Officer regarding maintenance and repair issues across the city.

Here's the latest digest:

Bridgend Tree pruning in 2018, toilet being sprayed with silicone, pumphouse roof repaired, and leafmould bay will be built.

Carricknowe Trying to get Council forestry section to remove ash tree, barrow shed hasp still to be welded.

Claremont Park Hedge cutting completed, water taps done, green netting to be finished, shared fencing in 2018.

Craigentinny Taps all repaired, trees still to be done, further security issues at south east corner.

Dumbryden Scrape and dust pathways, taps all repaired.

Ferry Road Tar path repair completed, small trees to be pruned.

Inverleith Removing non-fruiting trees.

Kirklistion Water supply fixed.

Lady Road Tree works in cemetery.

Leith Links Tree pruning.

Lochend Square Raise fence, water fixed.

Midmar Create hard standing.

Northfield Investigate water harvesting system, repair fence.

Pilrig Park Beech whips to be planted.

Redhall Trees pruned.

Saughton Mains Trees pruned.

Warristion Leaf mould bin ordered, tree work complete.

West Mains Extra security at garages.

Many sites are requiring new notice boards. It is noted the supply of these has just become more problematic. It is debatable if this is a good investment of scarce resources. What do you think? Also, some sites do not send representatives to FEDAGA meetings or have a member on the Management Team. It would be great if you could get in [touch](#) to help us better represent you.

Multidrum Soil Screener Demo



The business.

Ferry Road have got hold of a multidrum soil screener. For a video of the unboxing and building of this cement mixer driven apparatus, click [here](#).

This bit of kit was purchased with the aid of a grant. It is a big component in their "Completing The Composting Cycle" project. For further information, consult the blog [here](#). (Tip: scroll to the foot of the page and work upwards to read the entries in order.)

Interesting Requests

A couple of unusual requests have been received. They're reproduced for your perusal.

Eilidh Izat is an architect and her partner Jack is a chef. They are looking to arrange a series of supper club events in beautiful spaces around Edinburgh next year - a sort of food/architecture combo! They are interested in using allotments as a venue and have contacted FEDAGA to see if any sites would be interested in hosting such an event. They are willing to discuss costs or donations. We're throwing this interesting proposal out to you (but can see a few practical problems in staging a dinner event outdoors where at the best there might be a composting toilet but more likely a bucket in a shed).

Sarah Lauder is a producer in Edinburgh and is pulling together a photoshoot for a financial organisation client. They are looking to target their newly retired customers who still have a lot of vim and vigour and are enjoying an active retirement. One of the images she wants to take is of 2 men in their allotment chatting and having fun but they need a very well kept, souped up version of an allotment and shed. If you could think of 2 men with such a utopian plot available then perhaps your site funds might just be in line for a boost!!

Contacts: Eilidh - click [here](#) and Sarah - click [here](#).

And finally...



...we've just got time to let you know of a couple of allotment-related news items.

The 2017 **Greenspace Use and Attitude Survey** shows a drop in numbers of people who grow their own fruit and veg - down to less than a quarter. 7% of those use an allotment. The figures will be useful for the development of Allotment and Food Growing Strategies as required by part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act (see Judy Wilkinson, above).

MYHarvest (Measure Your Harvest) is your opportunity to participate in an exciting research project that will estimate the contribution people who grow their own fruit and vegetable crops are making to UK national food production.

For further details, go to the [FEDAGA website](#).