

SIMONE DILKARA

Compost Manager



Bugs in the beds

Simone loves her bugs. She carefully nurtures them and then sets them free to merrily munch our waste

I'm from this area originally. My mum was school teacher at Bungendore for many years. I grew up with farms and I loved the dirt, the horses and the gardens so it's always been a passion of mine.

Eventually I ended up with a job in project management looking specifically at how to get nutrients out of the waste stream and back on the farm. So for me working here at Landtasia it's a dream job, I love the challenges we've overcome.

To take household 'waste' and turn it into a useful agricultural product is just so incredibly rewarding — I love it. There's so much to learn about farming — every stage we get to raises another series of questions.

When the truck from Braidwood, Captains Flat or Bungendore arrives, it tips out garden organics and food-

waste onto the hard-stand area. We also receive commercial food-waste from the Canberra/Queanbeyan area as well.

Deep underneath the hard-stand area are impermeable layers so that there is no connection between the composting process and the ground water.

Then we pick out the rubbish, bottles, plastic bags and anything else unsuitable for composting before spraying the pile with water and our microbe mixture.

After the moisture level is right we push it into a pile and cover it with a weighted tarpaulin so that nothing can blow away. It sits there and ferments for six weeks during which time we check its temperature each week. This gives us an easy way of checking what's going on in the pile.

Within 24 hrs the temperature climbs

to over 65°C and stays around there until it reaches the fermentation stage where it will stabilise at around 55-60°C. It's quite a hot process.

It's not a zero oxygen process we use, it's a fermentation process mostly, but it's never completely aerobic or anaerobic. The inoculants we add are used so that once the pile has had its first flush of biological activity, the easy sugars are gobbled up by the bugs, the oxygen level starts dropping which leads to a fermentation process rather than a rotting process.

After six weeks we pull off the tarp and break the material apart using a hay-grabber on the tractor. We've found it to be the perfect implement for the job. We move the material that was on the outside in to the middle, mixing it all up.

We pile it up and cover it again for another six weeks. After that we bring in the screener and separate the larger bits for further fermenting. The fine material is piled and covered again and we monitor it until the temperature drops to around 30°C.

Then we run tests for CO² respiration and ammonia and these tests tell us when the compost has become mature enough to send samples off for independent testing. It's tested for heavy metals and the like and put through a series of artificial seasons to check that nothing germinates.

It takes about six months from go to whoa — from the truck arriving and dropping the garbage, to the certified compost ready for the farm.

At any one time on site we have a finished pile, a pile of oversized material, one finishing its second stage of fermentation and a couple of younger piles, one up to six weeks to two months old and one that's just had new material added to it. We build large piles to achieve the critical mass needed to keep heat and moisture in the piles.

We now have vegetable growers buying our compost and the positive feedback we receive from them makes the whole job worthwhile.



TOP: SIMONE WITH THE FINISHED PRODUCT, RIGHT: WITH CO-WORKER DAVE.



CATHERINE MOORE

Supporter of the environment, artist, hermit

Brush with the bush

Palerang Councillor and Greens candidate for many years

Growing up in a then undeveloped, slightly remote leafy Sydney suburb on a block that sloped down to a creek in a gully must have given me my love of the bush. And having my grandparents two minutes walk away, with chooks and a vegetable garden, instilled in me an early feeling for self-sufficiency. I swapped university in Sydney for art school in Canberra, and that's how I ended up at Charleys Forest, with a brief sojourn at Hoskinstown along the way, in the pink stone house made from rock quarried on the property. Somehow, it wasn't quite remote enough, and when I had to move, Charleys Forest presented itself almost immediately and I have been there ever since.

In primary school I started going with my father to Saturday morning Royal Art Society classes round the harbour. He had taken up art in his thirties, when he was convalescing from hepatitis. Further back, on my mother's side, my great great uncle was a contemporary of Arthur Streeton and Sidney Long and some of his wonderful oil paintings and watercolours still survive, although he died young. So art has been there from the beginning and is an essential part of my life.

When I first moved to Charleys Forest, with the intention of being a hermit, I lived in my tent, and it was while I was listening to the radio and watching the micro-life in the creek that I started to think more about democracy, and politics. Sydney swimmers had complained about poo in the surf, so a deep ocean outfall was proposed by the then State Government.

To me, the idea of sending sewage out of sight, out of mind, out to sea was not only an irresponsible waste of a potential resource, at a time when much of our soil was being blown away in huge windstorms, it was also polluting our oceans. So I wrote to the relevant Minister expressing my concern, but the letter mustn't have been read properly, and the response I received from the bureaucracy reas-

sured me that all would be well as the sewage was being pumped out to sea. Some time later the Welcome Reef Dam proposal for the Shoalhaven River reared its ugly head and I was incensed that ...

people's livelihoods were suddenly in limbo because the population of Sydney, growing all the time, seemed unable to practise water conservation ...

and instead, a river hundreds of kilometres away from the potential beneficiaries was going to be damned so that city could continue to grow and consume without restriction.

While all this was happening I was wishing there was a Greens party like there was in Germany, and then, in late 1992 I saw the announcement on the news that the Australian Greens had formed and I made contact the next day.

I can't help believing that most people want to look after the planet, live in harmony with each other, have the opportunity of genuinely influencing how and what political decisions are made and be part of a system that cares for people and ensures that their basic needs are met. That's what The Greens are about, and if the other parties take it on, all the better. It's not about who achieves those goals, it's about making sure they happen.



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