Moniaive Initiative

September 2025

Community Composting Visit Report

A detailed exploration of my insightful experience at community composting sites around Glasgow, sharing knowledge and practices.

Presented to

Community Members

Presented by

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Community Compost Station
for more info please see our noticeboard
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Community Composting

An Overview of Our Visit Experience

During my visit to the several different community composting sites, I discovered several **key practices** that highlight the importance of composting in reducing waste and enriching soil health. In particular I went to investigate the Jora for which we have secured funding. For us in Moniaive our Volunteers will play a crucial role in maintaining the composter, ensuring proper aeration and moisture levels to facilitate the decomposition process. I was inspired by the community's commitment to sustainability, as they utilize compost to nourish local gardens and reduce chemical fertilizer use. The initiative not only minimizes landfill waste but also fosters a sense of community, empowering residents and children to engage in eco-friendly practices and learn about the benefits of composting for the environment and how we can replicate this in Moniaive.

Site Visit Report

Location:

Blether and Neilston community composting hub, St Angelas Primary School community composting, Woodlands community garden, Carsphairn (private residence for prototype of upcycled Jora)

Date of Visit: 5th September

Purpose of Visit: To observe and learn from an established community composting scheme and explore best practices for Moniaive's upcoming initiative.

Overview

We visited multiple sites to gain insights into their long-running community composting operations. The visit aimed to inform the setup and management of Moniaive's new Jora composter system, funded earlier this year. We were particularly interested in logistics, community engagement strategies, and maintenance routines.

Community Composting Neilston

Community Composting Neilston and Primary School

Key Observations

- Composting Infrastructure: Neilston uses multiple Jora units, with bins padlocked and access codes shared only with registered users — a system we plan to replicate in Moniaive for security and accountability. You'll notice the Jora's have a wooden structure built around them, this is to keep the sun away from them.

However the Primary School did not share the same concerns and had no shade.

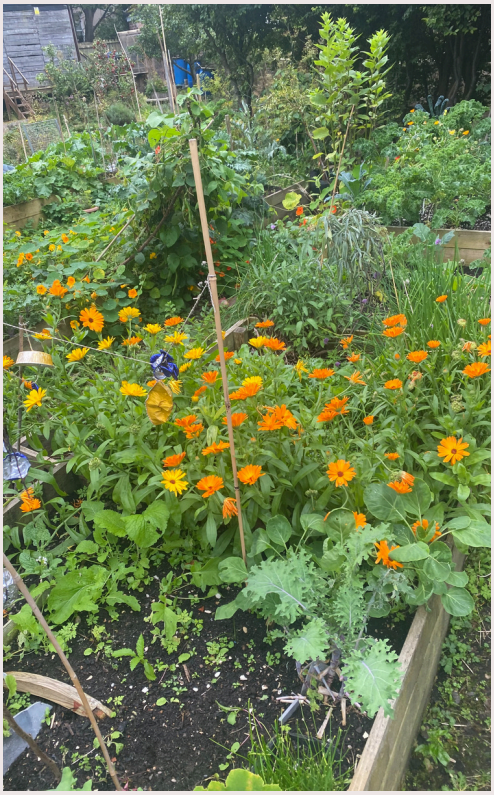
Neilston's approach adds a unique layer: their community shop receives daily surplus food donations from retailers like Marks & Spencer and Co-op. Any items that cannot be redistributed before midnight are diverted into the composting system. This not only reduces waste but strengthens the link between food rescue and soil regeneration

Interestingly we were advised not to use cardboard in the Jora, as the units rely on a balanced mix of nitrogen-rich food waste and carbon-rich bulking agents, but cardboard isn't suitable for them because:

- It breaks down too slowly in the sealed tumbling environment. Too dense.
- It can attract pests or create anaerobic pockets if not shredded finely.
- It's better suited for maturation bays or traditional compost heaps where airflow and microbial diversity are higher.

Instead, we were highly recommend to use small pieces of bark — ideally chipped or shredded — to speed up decomposition. We need to source a supply of this.

One practical insight from Neilston's setup is how they manage liquid seepage from the Jora units. This nutrient-rich runoff — often referred to as "compost tea" — is absorbed using crates of pine pellets placed under the unit (sourced from B&M). These pellets soak up the liquid effectively, preventing mess and odour while retaining valuable nutrients.



Once saturated, the pellets are added back into the Jora, contributing both carbon and moisture balance to the composting process. It's a low-cost, circular solution that turns a potential issue into a resource — and could be easily replicated in Moniaive.

Community Composting Neilston and Primary School

The Primary School we visited operates two Jora composters, affectionately named by the children — a brilliant way to build ownership and engagement. The system uses one keycode padlock and three key padlocks. The active bin is the keypad which code shared via a shared WhatsApp group, ensuring clarity and coordination among staff and volunteers.

Community Composting Neilston and Primary School

Food waste caddies are strategically placed in the playground, canteen, and staff room, and emptied once a week. This setup demonstrates how composting can be seamlessly integrated into school routines, with minimal disruption and strong educational value.

In Woodlands, the composting system is integrated into a shared community garden, where each household maintains its own plot. The composter in use is a Riadan — significantly larger and more expensive than the Jora units used elsewhere. This scale suits the garden's collective nature and higher volume of organic waste.

Residents deposit their food waste into a communal bin, and volunteers transfer it into the Riadan as needed. This flexible, demand-based approach reduces daily pressure and allows composting to fit around volunteer availability. It's a practical model for larger communities or gardens with staggered activity.

Community Composting Neilston, Primary School and Woodlands

·Compost Maturation & Pest Prevention

An interesting takeaway from the visit was the approach to compost maturation. All sites had one side of the Jora in use and the other resting. While the compost produced by the Jora units can be used immediately for applications like mulch, it's recommended to transfer it to a maturation bay after approximately three weeks. If used straight away there is more chance of seeds germinating, however it could be used over the winter months as it continues to break down further.

An extended resting period — typically 6 to 12 months — allows the compost to fully break down, stabilize, and become richer for use in soil conditioning. The bays observed on this visit added cardboard (or sheeps wool) at this stage to keep the moisture locked in and encourage worms, All maturation bays observed were fitted with rat-proof wire mesh around the base. Some bays were made with pallet collars, although I feel these are highly sought after and may not be able to source them for free. Although no sightings of rats were reported, this precaution reflects thoughtful design and community reassurance. It's a simple but effective measure that Moniaive could adopt to ensure hygiene and confidence in the system.

Community Composting Neilston, Primary School and Woodlands

User Engagement:
While the Jora units are intended for broader community use, Neilston's community shop currently generates such a high volume of food waste — particularly from daily donations by retailers — that the composting system is primarily occupied with processing shop surplus. As a result, wider community access hasn't yet been addressed.

Volunteer involvement appears limited, with no formal rota in place. This seems less a reflection of community disinterest and more a result of the organiser (Cat) being stretched for time. With clearer delegation and support, there's potential to build a more sustainable volunteer structure and open up the system to broader participation.

An innovative practice shared during the visit involves using bokashi to reduce odours in food waste caddies. Some groups, after emptying the caddies, will:

- Lightly rinse or wet the caddy, then
- Add a sprinkle of bokashi bran before returning it to users
- Alternatively, provide a small bag of bokashi with each caddy for home use

This simple step helps ferment the waste slightly, minimizing smells and making the system more suitable for indoor storage — especially in schools, shops, or homes with limited outdoor space. It's a great example of how composting can be made more accessible and user-friendly.

Community Composting Neilston, Primary School and Woodlands

Maintenance & Monitoring:

In the school the children rotate responsibilities for turning compost, checking temperatures (using a compost thermometer), and managing inputs. A simple logbook system helps them track activity and identify issues early. All sites recommended cleaning the outside of the Jora weekly to prevent rust. Interestingly we were told not to add more than 10% of coffee grounds as it can melt the insulation.

Community Composting Neilston, Primary School and Woodlands

Wish I knew before:

- Make signage clear, people complained at Neilston initially because they though the Jora's were actually a BBQ station
- Do not over fill the Jura as this will cause smells. To keep the composting process efficient and odour-free, it's important not to overfill the Jora. Overloading can:
- Disrupt the airflow and slow decomposition
- Make turning the drum difficult
- Lead to excess seepage or imbalance in moisture levels

Neilston recommends keeping the contents below the halfway mark in each chamber, allowing space for aeration and easy mixing. Regular turning and balanced input (greens and browns) help maintain ideal conditions.

- When emptying the Jora, leave a small amount of compost inside. This leftover material is rich in beneficial bacteria and microbes that act like a natural "starter," helping the next batch break down faster — just like keeping a bit of sourdough to kick off the next loaf.

Takeaways for Moniaive

- We'll adopt a similar padlock/code system for security and accountability.
- A shared group chat (already in place) will be central for coordination.
- Educational signage and storytelling will help build community pride and understanding.
- A volunteer rota for maintenance, such as cleaning the Jora, checking the correct level of browns and moisture level. Creating a logbook that could support long-term maintenance and engagement.
- More to do with food waste than garden waste, although we can use garden waste to top up the Jora if needed.
- Larger items of food waste need to be chopped up smaller, e.g. raw potatoes
- Bokashi will eliminate smells
- Need a resting bay.
- A method of measuring how much waste we compost would support good practice that we could use to roll out across the region.

For example:

1. Weighing at Input Stage

Use a simple digital hanging scale or bucket scale to weigh food waste before adding it to the composter.

Record weights weekly or monthly to track trends and seasonal variations.

2. Volume Estimation by Container

If weighing isn't feasible, estimate by standard container volume (e.g. a 10L caddy = ~4kg of food waste).

Keep a tally of how many containers are emptied per week.

Community Composting Neilston, Primary School and Woodlands

Next Steps

- ·Order the Jora from Sweden!
- Finalize caddy distribution.
- Design signage and educational materials
- Develop a volunteer rota and compost log system
- Share learnings with the Moniaive group via WhatsApp and upcoming meetings
- Notify SEPA of our exemption via the self-assessment scoring sheet.
- Source padlocks (one keypad, one key) and wood chip

Community Composting Neilston, Primary School and Woodlands

Community Composting — Step by Step

!. .Set up (we need to build this from flatpack)

- · Designate one Active bin; keep the others locked.
- · Fit a numbered keypad on the active bin; key locks on the other.
- · Build/position a simple wooden shade to keep direct sun off.

2. Make your carbon mix ready

- · Keep two tubs: DRY carbon (chipped bark, pine pellets) and SLIGHTLY WET carbon (pre-moistened).
- · Aim for a carbon blend of roughly ~50/50 (chipped bark : pine pellets)
- · Store enough nearby for easy "cover-as-you-go".

3. Start the active bin ("prime" it)

- · Add a 10–15 cm base layer of carbon underneath to catch seepage.
- · If you have any finished compost, throw in a few shovels as a starter.

4,. Each time food waste is added

- · Add equal volume of food scraps : chipped bark (1:1 by volume).
- · Check moisture: aim for wrung-out sponge feel; add dry or damp carbon to correct.

5. First-week aeration

- · When you first begin adding waste, turn the mix 5 full times o kickstart airflow and heat.

Ongoing routine

- · When the bin is about half full, turn once daily (quick mix/aerate).
- · Keep the lid shut and locked.

Weekly hygiene (set day)

- · Clean the opening/lip (“the opening bit”) once a week—brush + water.
- · Top up both dry and damp carbon stores.
- Switching & emptying
- · When full, lock the bin to rest/finish and switch the keypad to a new active bin.

When you empty a finished bin, leave a few shovels in the bottom as a microbial “starter” for the next cycle (like a sourdough starter).

Quick fixes (common issues)

- · Smelly/flies/slimy: add DRY carbon generously, cover fully, turn.
- · Too dry/not heating: add SLIGHTLY WET carbon (or a light sprinkle of water) and turn.

Lid-Top Cheat Sheet

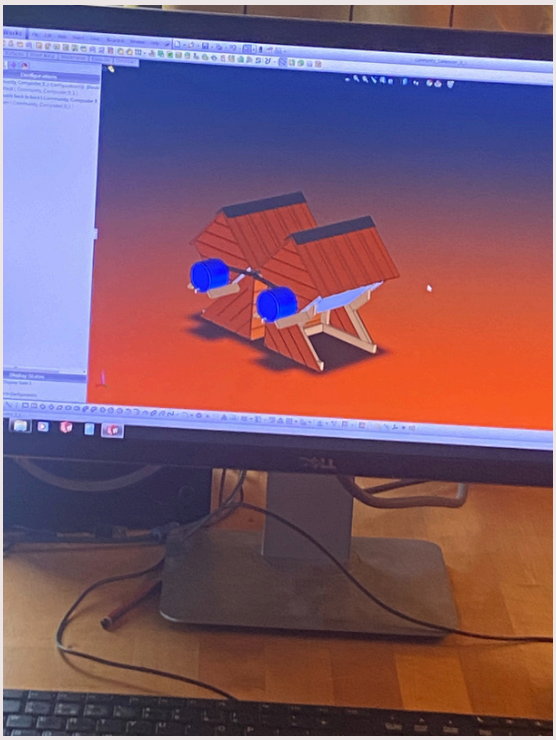
Add food → add equal volume chipped bark → cover completely.
Turn 5× at startup, then daily once half full.
Keep carbon under the mix at all times.
Weekly: clean opening, restock carbon.
When emptying, leave a starter layer.

Off-Grid Innovation: Prototype Jora from Recycled Materials

During the visit, we explored a residential property currently under construction — designed to be entirely off-grid. As part of their sustainability efforts, the residents have begun building a prototype Jora-style composter using recycled materials. The final model is expected to be completed by January 2026.

This DIY approach not only reduces costs but also opens the door to regional replication. If successful, these upcycled Jora units could be rolled out across other communities, making composting more accessible and affordable — especially in areas where funding or infrastructure is limited.

This visit highlighted the potential for grassroots innovation to complement formal schemes, and it's a powerful example of circularity in action.



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