

Precautions for handling compost and bark chippings

Composting often results in the growth of large numbers of fungi in the rotting material. One of the most important fungi involved in the composting process is *Aspergillus fumigatus*. *Aspergillus fumigatus* is the main cause of several medical problems varying from causing irritating allergy & asthma right up to and including serious invasive infections with consequent lung damage and severe disability that can be incurable.

There have been two known deaths in the UK over the last few years that may have been caused by people accidentally inhaling huge numbers of fungal spores from bags of compost that they opened not knowing the potential health hazards.

We would like to make people more aware of the dangers. Precautions include taking care when opening bags of compost as that seems to be a consistent theme, but also care can be needed when handling any heaps of rotting material. Take care not to inhale the clouds of spores that can be released when opening bags of compost, only open bags outdoors and preferably on a day when enough wind is blowing to prevent the spore clouds building up as you work.

Needless to say people who suffer from asthma & allergies should take more precautions.

If at all in doubt we have information of facemasks that meet the standards required to filter out most of the spores while you are working with rotting material – NOTE ordinary dust masks will NOT work:

www.aspergillus.org.uk/secure/airquality/facemasks.php

Some suggested suppliers & fitting the facemask:

www.aspergillus.org.uk/newpatients/leaflets/Facemaskfitting&suppliers.pdf

Gardening is a safe, healthy pastime for most of us and composting is certainly to be encouraged. Let's help keep it safe for everyone!

Many thanks

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