



Mudbrick head gardener Mark Robinson with Micro greens

A sustainable difference



BY KHADIJA SERGENT

At the Mudbrick vineyard and restaurant, there is a real commitment to going green. Geographically isolated on Waiheke Island, the restaurant has adopted a natural, cost-effective and easy-to-use method to manage its commercial kitchen waste: the Bokashi composting system.

"We've been using this system for two years now and it works very well," says Mark Robinson, Mudbrick head gardener. "We are recycling about three tonnes of kitchen food waste per month since we've been using the Bokashi technique."

Bokashi is a Japanese word meaning 'fermented organic matter.' The process is based on the fermentation of food waste rather than waste putrefying that takes place in a traditional composting system. It relies on anaerobic fermentation (without oxygen) to break down organic matter, and also has the helpful side-effect of eliminating unpleasant odours.

It was traditionally used by Japanese farmers as a fertiliser but the current Bokashi formulation was only developed in the 1980s.

Bokashi compost improves soil

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Page 20 > conditions and supplies plants with nourishing organic matter. And, adds Mark, it's "very simple. Every day we collect our food scraps into a big bin. Anything goes – meat, fish, coffee – except bones, shells and liquids.

"I sprinkle a layer of the Bokashi mixture made of sawdust/wheat bran, molasses and micro-organisms over the top, and then I repeat the operation with alternating layers of food scraps and Bokashi until the bin is full. Once I seal the bin, the bokashi engages the decomposition process."

During fermentation, a light brown juice extract, smelling slightly of pickles, is generated and collected. "Our bins are equipped with a tap at the bottom from where I drain the fermented fluid every day," says Mark. "Then I can reuse it as a natural fertiliser in the garden or for indoor plants, or as a drain-cleaner for kitchen sinks or toilets. It is highly concentrated, so I only add one teaspoon of the fluid to five litres of water."

After two to three weeks in the bin, a white film of fungal threads appears on the top of the Bokashi matter. This means the process is working, explains Mark.

Mudbrick grows its own 'micro greens' to supply the restaurant and any leftovers are recycled together with the fermenting scraps by layers. "The whole mixture will take three months or so to break down into ready-to-use soil," says Mark. "The beauty is that it doesn't smell or attract vermin.

"There are many benefits using this eco-friendly initiative," says Mark, "and I highly recommend it to every business."



By using Bokashi, the restaurant has saved a huge amount of food waste from going to landfills on the mainland. "It's an effective local solution for waste disposal," says Mark. "The system has also enabled us to save money in operational and waste transportation costs.

"We're recycling food and saving money. We produce healthy home-made compost and make our garden healthy.

"This is an easy process and it only takes five minutes of my time every day. Plus it is a lifestyle job – I also do it at my own place."