

## **Bone meal**

By Christo Snyman (South Africa)

Noun. Dried, ground animal bones, used as fertilizer.

Welcome to my garden. Those are my cycads over there. Aren't they gorgeous? I've worked hard to get them like that. The soil wasn't good when I first built the house: it had a high clay content. But I knew I could change it if I persevered.

Every morning before work I took the kitchen cuttings out. Potato peels, avocado pits – all the organic stuff that would normally end up in the bin. I buried them carefully in different spots. And then, on two special occasions, crab cuttings. Any kind of shellfish is an excellent source of bone meal. It decomposes quickly. It's a dirty job, burying kitchen waste, but look how it's paid off.

Look at my corderlines. They were drooping before. Look at the geraniums. See the beautiful blooms? But the cycads are my pride and joy. Look at the healthy greens, the radiant blues. The Ferox was dying at one stage. Too much sun, they said. So I covered it with shade netting. Now just look at it – a healthy, glowing green.

It's become a bit of a morning habit, you know – burying the kitchen scrap. If I haven't prepared fresh vegetables for supper, I start to get anxious from about dawn. I can't sleep. My morning therapy won't be there when I wake up. I started to bury old chicken bones at one stage, but my landscaper found out. She advised against it. Shellfish cuttings were fine, she said, but chicken bones would take too long to biodegrade.

Naturally I don't agree with her. Burying things is a long-term investment. My garden is my solace, a haven far from work. And burying organic matter is no quick fix. Everything takes time to decompose. It's a long-term solution to the clay-soil problem. Soon my clay-soil problem will be gone – like some of my other problems.

Mike from the office said I was a bit obsessive. Of course, Mike was talking nonsense. My job is to write articles for the Legal Issues journal every month. I'm not the best lawyer in the team. I don't like arguments. That's why I've been given research responsibilities. I investigate what my colleagues are working on and what's happening in the industry.

My articles are really interesting. They deal with the finer points of law. But the Marketing department spoils them. (Marketing has to sign them off before the company will publish them.) Marketing says the articles are too academic; they need to be more reader-friendly. What nonsense! Mike was from Marketing.

Getting back to chicken bones, don't you agree that it's better if things take longer to decompose? Years into the future there'll always be decomposing matter in the ground, feeding the plants from day to day, making them strong and robust.

I've disregarded my landscaper's advice. What does she know? I started burying chicken bones at random. And why stop at chicken bones? I buried some leftover oxtail bones just the other day. Before long this became part of the staple diet of my cycads. I know they enjoyed it. They became healthier. Their green glowed and they wanted more. If only cycads could speak.

My freezer drawers have never been really full before. I only buy meat once a month. But the drawers are quite deep. I started to fill them with kitchen cuttings when there was too much to bury. They still weren't full. But now they're full.

Wait, don't go! You haven't seen my rose garden yet – it's on the north side of the house ...