

Compost Bins for Residents

Why Is Backyard Composting Important?

- The Legislature extended the State's 50% material recovery goal from 2000 to 2009 and set an interim goal of 45% by 2005. Oregonians are recycling more waste each year, but we also continue to send more waste to the landfill.
- Backyard composting helps to keep organic materials out of landfills, avoids the cost of hauling materials to a central composting site and turns waste into a useful garden product.
- For residents, making and using compost reduces the need to water as much in summer or apply as many pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Compost also helps plants grow better.
- Communities that encourage backyard composting benefit by reducing water demand and the amount of herbicides and pesticides in storm water run-off.
- Compost use helps build the health of soils by increasing soil organic matter, nutrients and water-holding capacity.

Why Distribute Compost Bins?

Communities distribute compost bins for many of the same reasons they distributed recycling bins during the 1980's and early 1990's. People respond enthusiastically to the availability of reduced-price or free bins and participation increases considerably. Residents who own bins have a visible reminder of their intention to compost.

The community can benefit from increased residential participation through reduced municipal costs for managing yard trimmings. Residents who normally pay for yard trimmings collection can save money by practicing backyard composting. In Portland residents pay for collection of yard debris whether they use it or not. Some people may be concerned that a bin distribution program will compete with the sale of compost bins at retail stores and garden centers. Bin distribution programs generally target a much larger audience than the relatively small percentage of interested gardeners and recyclers that go to stores and purchase bins at retail price.

How Much Will It Cost?

Composting bin distribution programs have a number of associated costs in addition to the cost of the bins. Cost will vary depending on the method of distribution selected, staff costs,

volunteer training, the amount of bin subsidy (if any) and the level of promotion conducted.

Possible costs to include in a budget:

- Program administration (staff to design and oversee program)
- Bins (from \$20 for a home-built type to over \$100 for commercial bins)
- Delivery costs (trucking, contracting with a group or firm for delivery)
- Program promotion (printed material, advertisements, mail, etc.)
- Educational outreach (site use, refreshments, instructors, etc.)
- Cost associated with the bin distribution event (parking lot rental, rental of canopies to keep volunteers dry, directional signs, coffee for volunteers, etc.)

Costs for operating a bin distribution program can often be reduced when local governments work cooperatively to order bins, provide workshops and promote the program.

Some program options:

- **Free bins** (no cost to resident). The cost to the community of providing free bins may be offset through the avoided cost of collection and handling yard trimmings in communities that operate their own collection and/or solid waste disposal systems.
- **Subsidized bins**. This option is growing in popularity. The assumption is that residents are more committed to composting if they make a personal investment in paying for the bin, as opposed to getting it for free. Communities purchase bins at a reduced price and further discount the price to residents through a subsidy or rebate. Residents typically pay from 1/4 to 1/2 of the retail cost of a bin.
- **At-cost bins**. Communities can obtain bins at reduced or wholesale prices by ordering them in quantity from a distributor or manufacturer. They pass on the savings to residents by reselling the bins at cost. Residents generally pay less for these bins than if they bought them at a store or through a mail-order catalog.
- The manufacturer/distributor provides news releases, ad copy, publicity ideas, and handles the ordering and shipping of the bins.
- Residents order the bins directly by phone or mail.



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- The manufacturer/distributor sends compost bins and informational booklets, imprinted with the community's name, directly to the purchaser.

Planning a Compost Bin Distribution Program

Communities may want to start with a pilot program, particularly if resources are limited.

- **Consider forming an advisory committee** to solicit input and assistance from municipal staff, educational support persons, haulers, local retailers, Master Gardeners or Master Composters, and other civic groups. Set some target goals and be sure to clearly define roles and responsibilities for each participating entity.
- **Learn more about specific community needs.** Community survey is an excellent method for gaining this type of information.
- **Select recipients of the bins.** What criteria will be used to identify recipients? Neighborhoods, income level, users of yard debris drop-offs or curbside collection? Only participants who attend workshops? Or those without composting experience? How will criteria be assessed?
What strategies will be used to allocate bins if interest in the program exceeds the number of bins available?
- **Select bins to distribute**
 - Cost and durability - can they last for ten years?
 - Ease of use - for assembling, adding compostables, mixing and removing compost
 - Aesthetic appearance - select styles that blend well into the yard
 - Moisture retention and aeration
 - Recycled content - amount of recycled content, especially from post-consumer sources
 - Manufacturer: support literature, warranty, ethics, ability to supply regularly on-time, etc.
 - Capacity and potential for expansion - larger bins are better for wetter climates
 - Car or truck friendliness - for transportation to home sites
 - Pet, rodent and insect resistance.

A good way to get lots of information about bins is to put out a request for proposals (RFP).

- At educational workshops
- At compost demonstration sites
- At distribution points over a period of time at conveniently located facilities such as garden store, library
- Mail-in/phone-in ordering and home delivery
- Blanket door-to-door delivery
- Compost bin day/raffle/promotion
- Hauler-based distribution

Experience has shown that it is possible to over-publicize this event. The result can be that people stand in line for a long time to find out there are no more bins available.

Design a supportive educational program.

Research has repeatedly shown that a person is more likely to use items given to them if they also receive some education about the item. At a minimum, informational booklets or pamphlets should be provided with bins as they are sold or given away. Ideally an educational workshop or a composting demonstration site is part of the bin distribution program.

Alternative Formats

Alternative formats of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications and Outreach, Portland, for more information, at (503) 229-5696

How and where will bins be distributed?

Since this should be a watershed-wide program, consider distributing the bins at strategic locations throughout the watershed, and not all on the same day.

Possible options: