

# Promoting Residential Composting

## What is a "Residential Composting Promotion Program"?

A residential composting promotion program provides information to the public about the benefits of backyard composting, how to set it up, and how to make it work. The program may include other elements such as providing, at-cost or subsidized, compost bins or worm bins.

A successful program raises people's awareness through different types of information (brochures, workshops) and makes sure they hear the message enough times to be effective. The program needs to include a composting demonstration site or sites. The law specifies that the program must be watershed-wide. A good way to comply with this is to have a demonstration site in each city above 4,000. You might determine that a different distribution of demonstration sites provides better program coverage throughout your watershed.

## What is backyard composting?

Composting, nature's own way of recycling, is the managed process of controlled decomposition of organic material such as leaves, twigs, grass clippings, and vegetative food waste. Compost is the soil amendment product that results from effective composting. Backyard composting means that people compost the yard debris and **vegetative** food waste they generate on site, in their own backyard. (No meat, grease, cheese, bread or other non-vegetative food items should be composted)

## Why is composting important?

The Legislature extended the Oregon'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 of yard debris and vegetative kitchen scraps helps to keep the high volume of organic material out of landfills avoids the cost of hauling materials to a central composting site and turns waste into a useful product.
- Residents who use the compost they produce can reduce the amount and the number of times they water their plants, use less fertilizers and pesticides, and enjoy improved plant growth and production.

- Communities that encourage backyard composting and the use of compost benefit by reducing water demand and the amount of herbicides and pesticides in storm water run-off.

## Planning a backyard composting promotion

Asking people to compost is asking for a behavioral change. While backyard composting will always be attractive to some residents, especially gardeners, it does require some attention. A carefully planned and targeted public education program will help you reach a broader audience than gardening enthusiasts.

Decide how many information "hits" it will take for a person to take action and plan your program accordingly.

- Who are you talking to? Who is your audience? Who do you want to start composting as a result of your program?
- What is the goal of your program? How many people now compost in your community?
- How many more people do you want to start composting as a result of your program?
- How are you going to get your message across?

**Use different ways to communicate** the same information for maximum impact.

- A brochure delivered by your hauler, made available at the library, gardening centers of local supermarkets, and nurseries; bin sales; and demonstration sites;
- Advertising: in utility bills (cheap and very effective), on billboards, on reader boards, at local retailers, in schools;
- Print media: the local newspaper, monthly newsletter of the Chamber of Commerce, the school district and downtown merchants;
- Broadcast media: local radio and TV stations. Contact them regularly with information they can use to inform their listeners and viewers about waste prevention in general. Establish a relationship;
- Have a booth at the gardening show, county fair, the opening of the new library, park, or downtown renovation.



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- Involve other organizations in your effort such as local or statewide gardening clubs, Master Gardeners or Master Recyclers.

Timing: Spring and Fall are the best times to implement a promotion program about backyard composting. Most homeowners have large volumes of grass clippings or leaves available for composting.

Get creative, think outside of the box when strategizing, and then select ideas you are going to follow up on, develop, and implement.

Don't reinvent the wheel. See what other communities and states are doing. Check out some of the resources listed below

### **Demonstration site**

How does a demonstration site fit in your promotion plan?

A demonstration site should have a number of types of active compost bins available for viewing by the public. Make sure signage is clear, weatherproof, and vandal-resistant.

Demonstrate different ways of composting, from just piling up plant material and food waste and letting it sit, to regular turning and monitoring of the pile.

Demonstrate different types of composting bins, with information on where to buy or how to build them. Contact bin manufacturers and ask them to provide a bin for free in exchange for your promotion of their product.

Use the demonstration site for other events - a grasscycling demonstration, a natural gardening workshop, a community event.

Have the site in a location that already attracts visitors, such as a recycling depot, landfill, community college, or public garden.

Is someone assigned to monitor the site? Contact your local OSU Extension field offices. Often their Master Gardeners can monitor the site, teach composting classes, or lead tours around your site.

Make information available year round, if possible.

**Also see; Fact Sheet: Compost Bins for Residents.**

### **Alternative Formats**

Alternative formats of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ Public Affairs for more information (503) 229-5696.