

## Compost Bins for Residents

### Why Is Backyard Composting Important?

- The 1991 Legislature set a 50% material recovery goal for the state for the year 2000. Oregonians are recycling more waste each year, but we also continue to send more waste to the landfill. This suggests there are still lots of ways to reduce waste.
- 43% of municipal solid waste disposed of in Oregon in 1995 was yard debris, food waste, and other organics. Much of this could have been composted. Composting of yard and food waste alone can remove 15-20% from the household garbage can.
- Backyard composting helps to keep this mass of organic material 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?

The number one reason people had not started composting was because they didn't have a bin, according to a survey done in Alameda County, California, following implementation of an extensive backyard composting education program. One possible fix is for communities to encourage people to build their own bins, providing them with instructions and plans. A number of enthusiastic citizens have built bins. Experience indicates, however, that few beginning composters will spend the time and money to obtain materials and construct bins. To address this, communities in the U.S. and

Canada have provided composting bins to community members, either at reduced prices or

free. Bin distribution has significantly increased backyard composting participation rates.

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.

Communities 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. As more people begin composting, retail stores that sell compost bins may see increased demand for seeds, plants, tools and accessories.

### Benefits of a Bin Distribution Program

Data on yard trimming diversion rates and cost savings from bin distribution programs have not yet been well documented in composting and recycling literature. It can be difficult to separate out costs as bin distribution efforts are often part of larger education and/or solid waste management programs. Actual numbers for a community will depend on population size, per capita generation of vegetative kitchen scraps and yard trimmings, overall solid waste management, AND the design and administration of the bin distribution program.

A limited number of programs have maintained some data on quantities of yard trimmings and vegetative kitchen scraps diverted. Data from programs in California, Washington, Wisconsin



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and Florida show diversion rates ranging from 150 to 646 pounds per household per year.

### 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 \$2 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.

- **Bin manufacturer distributes directly to resident** (full cost to resident). An Ohio firm developed the concept where a community contracts with a bin manufacturer to operate the entire program.
  - 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.
  - 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.** Following is a simplified list of criteria adapted from programs in California and Florida:



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- 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).

**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:

- 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 are part of the bin distribution program.

- **Design a promotional strategy.** See factsheet on Residential Composting Promotion Campaign

#### **Written background documentation**

- Steve Apotheker, John Foseid and Meg Lynch, "Bin there, done that," Resource Recycling, December 1998, 16-20.
- John Foseid, "Diversion through compost bin distribution," BioCycle, January 1998, 51-52.
- Steven Sherman, "Analyzing the Costs and Benefits of Home Composting Programs," Resource Recycling, June 1996, 28-35.
- "Build a Pallet Compost Bin," a webpage of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to be found at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/air/waste/wm/recycle/Pallet/Pallet1.htm>.
- Carl Woestwin, "Evolution of home-based strategies for residential organics," BioCycle, May 1998, 37-39.
- MetroFacts "Home Composting Works in the Region": the results of a survey Metro conducted of backyard composting behavior in July 1998. Available on <http://www.metro.dst.or.us/metro/rem/garden/compworks.html>.
- "Compost at Home" and "Compost Demonstration Sites", two brochures by Metro that can be found at: <http://www.metro.dst.or.us/rem/garden/comphome.html> and <http://www.metro.dst.or.us/rem/garden/compdemo.html> respectively.
- California Integrated Waste Management Board, Waste Prevention World. Lots of information on composting and related subjects at <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/organics/HomeComp/default.htm>.
- DEQ Factsheet on Residential Composting Promotion Campaign.

## Existing Bin Distribution Programs

- Metro: contact John Foseid at (503) 797-1650, or [Foseidj@metro.dst.or.us](mailto:Foseidj@metro.dst.or.us).
- Deschutes County: contact Kelly Walker, Recycling Team of Central Oregon at (541) 388-3638, or [kwalker@bendnet.com](mailto:kwalker@bendnet.com).
- City of Eugene: contact Alex Cuyler at (541) 682-6830, or [alex.d.cuyler@ci.eugene.or.us](mailto:alex.d.cuyler@ci.eugene.or.us).
- BRING Recycling: contact Julie Daniel at (541) 746-3023, or [bring@efn.org](mailto:bring@efn.org).
- Marion County: contact Terry Fristad at (503) 588-5169 ext. 5991, or [tfristad@open.org](mailto:tfristad@open.org).
- Klatsop County, contact Dennis McNally, City of Gearhart at (503) 738-5501.



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