

Promoting Residential Composting



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

**Waste Prevention
and Management**
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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 food waste they generate on site, in their own backyard.

Why Is Composting Important?

The 1991 Legislature set a 50% material recovery goal for the state for the year 2000. While the amount of waste each Oregonian recycles goes up every year, so does the amount of waste every Oregonian throws away.

43% of municipal solid waste disposed of in Oregon in 1995 was yard debris, food waste, and other organics, much of which could have been composted.

Backyard composting 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.

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, 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.

Written background documentation

- Holly Johnson, "Lessons Learned from Home Composting," *BioCycle*, November 1998, 42-44.
- Carl Woestwin, "Evolution of home-based strategies for residential organics," *BioCycle*, May 1998, 37-39.
- Douglas County website. This site is small, simple, and clear, a great example: www.co.douglas.or.us/recycle/
- "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>.
- "Backyard Composting," a brochure published by "Keep America Beautiful," available for purchase to local governments. They will print your contact information on the back. Keep America Beautiful, Inc., (518) 842-4388 or at 9 West Broad Street, Stamford, Connecticut 06902. Terri Peterson, txpeters@co.douglas.or.us or at (541) 440-4350, used this brochure in Douglas County.

Referrals to existing programs with demonstration sites



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- Metro Recycling Information, (503) 234-3000, or www.metro.dst.or.us.
- Alex Cuyler, City of Eugene, (541) 682-6830, or alex.d.cuyler@ci.eugene.or.us.
- Terri Peterson, Douglas County, (541) 440-4350, or txpeters@co.douglas.or.us.
- Kelly Walker, Recycling Team of Central Oregon, (541) 388-3638, or recycle@bendnet.com.
- Dick Wanderscheid, City of Ashland, (541) 488-5306, or at dick@ashland.or.us.
- Dina DiNucci, City of Gresham, (503) 618-2656, or at dinuccid@ci.gresham.or.us. In Gresham's "Yard Debris Exemption Program" people receive a \$3.65 reduction on their garbage bill when they agree to compost yard waste instead of having it picked-up by the curbside yard-debris collection program. The approval process requires an application and a site inspection by a Master Gardener and composting expert who inspects the applicants' composting system before granting the exemption.



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