

Composting Classes Conservation Corner - June 2015

A frequent request we get from customers is an interest in a Curbside Composting Service for food scraps. It is my personal hope that one day in the near future, this will become a reality. From a business perspective, there are two significant questions that need to be addressed: 1. Which composting process makes the most sense for the size of our community. 2. Is our community willing to pay for the cost for this type of service? If you have an opinion about a curbside composting program for the future, let your elected county and city officials know your preference.

In the meantime, I would like to share “low hanging fruit” opportunities that are available today and provide some background information on why cooked food scraps are not a simple item to “commercially” keep out of the landfill.

Food-related waste is a tricky part of the waste stream. There are additional measures required by the health department to keep this valuable resource out of the landfill. The best way to reduce food scraps being landfilled or composted is to AVOID wasting food in the first place! Another option is to compost this material at home. This is not an option for everyone due to space, time and physical abilities. Currently, Recology Ashland does not have a “post-consumer” (this means food that has been processed, cooked with any kind of fat or partially consumed) composting program for residential customers. We do, however, have a composting program for “pre-consumer” (this includes uncooked, unprocessed fruits, vegetables that have not been partially consumed and coffee grounds) for businesses only. This program is only available to grocers, restaurants and coffee houses to name a few.

Ashland and Talent’s organics are currently transported to the Rogue Disposal site in Eagle Point. Rogue holds a permit to accept these materials commercially. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is concerned about post-consumer compost for three major reasons: Effluent (liquid from the composting process that could potentially go into streams and water tables), odor, and the ability of composting material to attract critters. Recology Ashland offers a yard debris program for residential and commercial customers and partners with the Ashland Conservation Commission to provide composting classes each summer at the recycle center.

Our Recycle Center at 220 Water Street has a year round ‘compost demonstration area’ with “urban appropriate” examples for yard debris and another for food scraps. If you have not visited this site, please come and check it out. In urban settings the importance of deterring ALL animals from accessing decaying food is critical. Rats, mice, dogs, skunks, raccoons, coyotes and even bears will gladly dine on your discards and this practice can create public health and safety concerns.

In addition to the compost demonstration area, in the summertime on (4) Saturday mornings, you can learn the basics of composting and then later attend an advanced class. Once you have learned the carbon/nitrogen ratio, it qualifies you to expand your knowledge further. This September, we will offer (2) different ways to make nutrient – rich fertilizer indoors with a minimal amount of space. We have a new instructor this year, John Flaherty, who is an OSU Extension Instructor with the Master Gardener program. John will teach participants how to divert food scraps and yard debris from the landfill by composting. Participants will be instructed on how to set up an enclosed compost system that deters critters. The (4) free classes offered

this summer are thanks to a long standing partnership between Recology Ashland and the Ashland Conservation Commission: The 2015 offerings are as follows:

4 Classes - (2) basic, (1) advanced, (1) vermi-compost & Bokashi method

Saturdays from 10 am – noon at the Recycle Center at 220 Water Street.

Basic Class – June 20th or July 18th. Pick one.

- Advanced Class – August 15th. Urban composters who have taken the intro class or know Nitrogen from Carbon are invited. The advanced class offers more information, techniques, & strategies. General knowledge of composting is required.

NEW * Bokashi method & Vermi(Worm)Composting Class - September 12th This is a great way to make nutrient-rich fertilizer with minimal space.

This class is free and sponsored by the City of Ashland Conservation Commission & Recology Ashland

Please park on Water Street (not in Recycle Center parking area)

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