

Community Composting Readiness Guide

Composting food scraps in cooperation with schools and community gardens

In light of Vermont's Universal Recycling Law, Act 148, individuals and communities are seeking solutions for managing food scraps and yard waste that meet the requirements and utilize these materials for local value. Composting can be a viable solution, whether through hauling to a regional waste management facility, starting backyard composting, or establishing community-based composting operations.

This guide is intended to support groups interested in starting small-scale community composting at schools and community gardens, as one solution to be incorporated into a broader community plan for organics waste management.

FIRST: decide as a group why you want a community compost system and what you hope to achieve through the project. This is central to determining the best model for your community. A few examples (with many more possibilities)...

- **Community garden-based:** Garden hosts drop off site for food scraps and garden waste from community gardeners only; possibly also includes garden neighbors
- **School-based:** Food scraps from school lunches and/or snacks and off-site carbon-based inputs
- **Community Farm-based:** Local farmers host a food scrap and yard waste drop off site and manage on site

SECOND: Make sure you have these **FOUR KEY INGREDIENTS** needed to set up your community composting operation for success;

- **Community Driven:** There is a desire, commitment to and established goals for composting on site within your school or community garden.
- **Management Support:** There are people willing and able to put in the time to effectively manage the compost system and guide users.
- **Site Requirements:** Your site meets community needs relating to the volume of material inputs, the space for managing them, and the people using it.
- **System Inputs & Outputs:** You have access or the ability to source system inputs, both carbon-based and nitrogen-based materials, for producing quality finished compost.

Community Driven: "Community" defined here as the group of people involved or partnering with a school or community garden or compost operation.

- **Commitment:** You have a community with common goals, able to develop and implement a clear plan for ongoing operation.
- **Feasibility:** You have explored costs and benefits of various options for diverting organics from the landfill. Needs, costs, outcomes.
 - Sample composting inputs: building supplies for bins, tools/equipment, people's time, feedstock.
 - Sample composting outputs: finished compost, environmental stewardship, education.
- **Scale and volume:** You have an estimate for how much food scraps /yard waste your community produces and decided what portion you will be composting.
- You have an understanding of your community's experience, interest and educational/training needs related to community composting.

Management Support

- Your community-driven plan details how the compost system will be managed and by whom. The system should be scaled to the time people are willing and able to commit and the volume of materials you wish to compost.
- There is an individual or a dedicated group of people willing and able to serve as the compost project coordinator(s), overseeing the entire operation.
 - Sample tasks: ongoing communication, recruiting and training volunteers, delegating tasks, ensuring proper system maintenance, sourcing materials as needed, etc.
- There are enough volunteers available for regular, year round management of your compost system.
 - Sample tasks: monitoring food scrap and other feedstock, turning compost piles, sifting compost, distributing finished compost, and providing education.
- There is a compost expert available either on-site or on-call for compost trouble-shooting.
 - Many sites utilize Extension Master Composters or others with composting expertise.
 - Non-profit, for-profit and governmental composting groups, such as local Solid Waste Management Districts can play a role in providing education and trouble-shooting support.

Site Requirements

- The site allows for safe flow of people and materials (accepting materials generated on and off site).
- You have researched composting options and developed a plan for the system best scaled to meet your goals, the volume of materials you plan to compost on-site, the people and resources available, and your site's capacity. Site plans should be thorough and reviewed by professionals.
- The site has the space to designate areas for holding and processing all materials accepted.
 - START SMALL with a system you can manage with your available resources. You may not be able to compost everything your community produces.
 - Include space for storing materials and tools, turning compost (by-hand or machine), curing and storing finished compost
- You have addressed site concerns, including managing "vectors" (animals), proper drainage to manage leachate and site safety concerns such as contamination issues, wells, or septic systems.
- There is easy access to tools on-site to compost effectively (i.e. pitch forks, chopping tools, etc.).
- The site is in a convenient location for those using it; accessible year-round, on convenient days/ times for food scrap drop-off and management.

System Inputs & Outputs

- There are adequate carbon-based and nitrogen-based materials available year round (generated on or off site) to run a balanced compost system at the site.
 - Materials generated off site should be vetted for contamination issues, especially horse manure.
- System inputs and outputs can be adequately monitored.
 - Set designated days and times for food scrap collection/drop off, paired with compost pile building and monitoring done by trained composters.
 - Educate community members about compost inputs through an orientation and clear signage.
 - Periodically send your finished compost to be tested for quality and safety.

For more resources, visit: www.vcgn.org/communitycompost

Vermont Community Garden Network

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