

The Binefits



O F C O M P O S T I N G

Spring 1994



OTHERS ARE GREEN WITH ENVY

You make the rest of the country a little green with envy by being one of 30,000 families in Seattle with a compost bin. A higher percentage of people compost yard waste here than just about anywhere else in the world. In fact, cities all over the country call Seattle for help in creating compost programs.

SEATTLE HAS "LESS" TO CELEBRATE IN 1994

All our yard debris, 15.4% of our residential waste stream, used to go to the landfill. But not anymore. Today with your compost bin and the curbside yard waste recycling program, virtually all of our yard waste is being recycled into compost. As a result, we are currently reducing and recycling more than 42% of our waste and moving toward our goal of 60% by 1998. We can all celebrate "less" because the less waste there is, the more we have to celebrate!

YOU'RE NOT JUST A HAS BIN

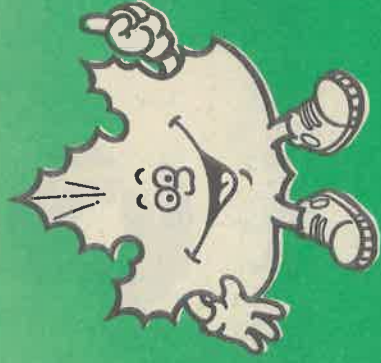
We've heard that some of you are still working out some minor glitches and aren't using your bin as much as you had hoped. So we asked some successful composters to share their experiences. We also put together simple tips on composting and answered some commonly asked questions. We've included a number of other resources that are available to you, too.

SPRING IS COMPOST BINGE TIME, SO COMMIT TO COMPOST!

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 9556

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TIPS FOR COMPOSTING YARD WASTE IN YOUR HOME COMPOSTER

COMPOSTING WEEDS

You can compost some weeds some of the time, but not all weeds all of the time. While the leaves of most weeds may be composted, the seed heads, or the roots and runners of spreading weeds such as morning glory, quack grass and buttercup, should not be composted in your bin. Many weed seeds, roots and runners will grow in your bin or in your garden when you use the compost. This occurs because there is not enough heat generated in your compost bin to safely "recycle" these unwelcome weeds. Instead, leave them out for curbside yard waste collection. The weeds will be composted in large "hot" piles.

COMPOSTING PRUNINGS FROM SHRUBS AND TREES

Tree and shrub branches larger than a quarter of an inch in diameter break down very slowly. A compost pile with lots of twigs and branches will dry out and won't decompose for years. Most woody materials should be shredded or chipped by machine before adding them to a pile. For information about renting chipping and shredding machinery, look under "Rental Service Yards" in the Yellow Pages.

Prunings more than a half-inch in diameter can be used in the garden for plant stakes or to make trellises. Any woody prunings up to four inches in diameter and four feet long can be bundled and put out for curbside yard waste collection.



Made from 40% post-consumer recycled newsprint



JAMES JACKSON
AKA "ACTION JACKSON," MT. BAKER

Composting Since: 1981

Specialty: Master Composter/Master Gardener

"My gardens thrive on the compost. I use the compost from my worm bin for my flower beds and in my pots in the green-house. I put yard waste compost into my vegetable gardens and all over my flower beds. We can't just take a lot of greens to the dump. This is organic material filled with nutrients and it needs to go back into the ground."

"In the South, where I grew up, farmers have been plowing or cutting material and turning it back into the soil for centuries. This prevents soil erosion and the top soil doesn't blow away. It worked for them and it works for me."



LYNN BARNICLE,
WEST SEATTLE

Composting Since: 1983

Specialty: Vegetables, sunflowers and pumpkins

"I like to have materials to enhance my soil. In addition, I feel good about reducing the waste I am putting in the waste stream. It's convenient to put organic matter in the bin versus putting it out for curbside collection. Plus it's better for the environment."

"My whole family is involved with gardening and the kids really understand composting. They will often dig into the compost bin to see what kinds of bugs are growing. Composting is a great thing for kids to get involved with."

Compost Quest

How long does this take - what am I doing wrong?

Everything organic will decompose over time - it just happens. You will know it is done when it is brown, crumbly and moist like rich earth. Depending upon the ingredients and the moisture level, it can take anywhere from 3 months to a year. You can speed up the process by watering your pile to keep it moist and turning it to increase aeration. Keeping the pile wet is the single most important thing you can do in the summer. A lot of sticks and branches can cause the compost to "cook" very slowly. However, if your pile is mainly grass clippings, some brown ingredients, like fallen leaves or old corn stalks, will help the process. For basic information on yard waste composting, call the Compost Hotline, 633-0224 to request the brochure, "Easy Composting of Yard Waste."

There are all sorts of bugs and worms in my compost bin - are they supposed to be there?

Bugs and worms contribute to the decomposition of your yard waste. Don't be afraid of these little creatures - they're good for your compost. Most bugs are necessary for the compost to "do its thing." Ants, on the other hand, can be a problem. They may be encouraged by a dry pile. To find out more about ants, call the King County/WSU Cooperative Extension at 296-3900 and ask for the bulletin on ants.

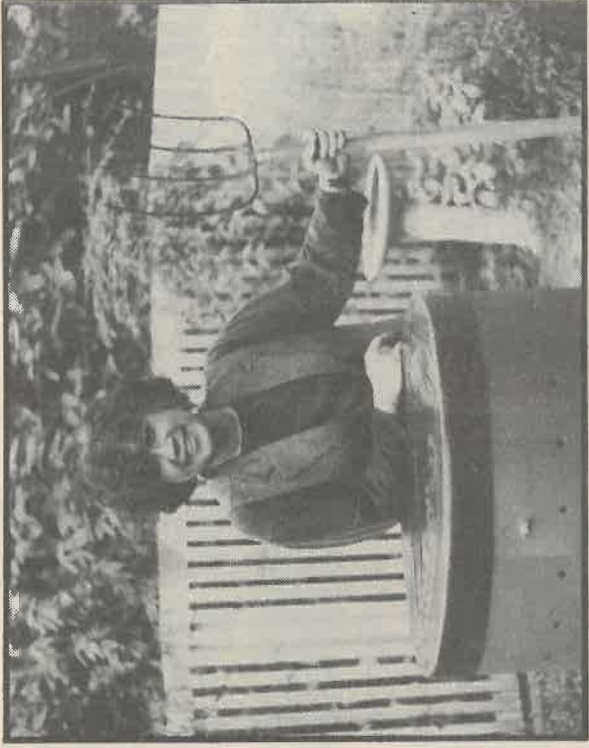


**JACK COVELLO,
SEWARD PARK**

Composting Since: 1936
Specialty: Vegetables, Fruits

"The compost gives the garden the best soil. In addition to my bin I bury the unripened or damaged fruits from my fig or pear trees under the tree. I dig trenches 12 to 18 inches deep and bury my fruit. By composting I also save on my disposal service."

"I learned composting from my dad over 50 years ago. He was born in Sicily and learned about composting and gardening over there. With all that experience behind me I didn't really have any particular problems doing it myself."



**SANDY LEW-MAILER,
MT. BAKER**

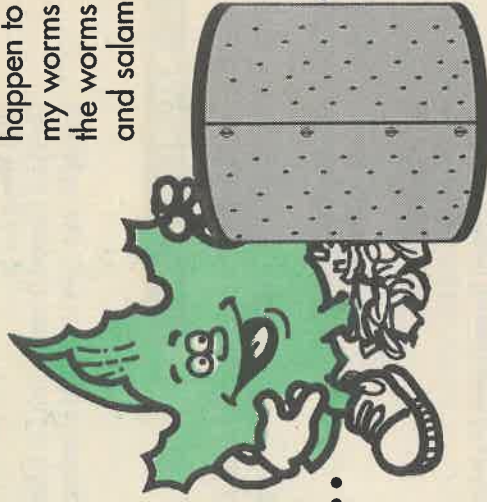
Composting Since: 1987
Specialty: Perennials

"I got tired of having so much waste and felt like I had to do something with it. I didn't like throwing it all away. We went down to one garbage can so it seemed like the natural thing to do. When I found out the city was giving away the bins I realized I just had to do this."

"Whatever yard waste I put in my bin will turn into compost with time. I know that I can make it either active or passive. If I am in a hurry I make it hotter by layering grass, leaves and weeds, and turning it."

"I use my worm bin because we live in an old house and the drain lines are not as open. I don't like to use the disposal and we make a lot of garbage in the kitchen. I like that something good is going to happen to it. I can be guilt free in the kitchen! I share my worms with friends all the time. My son even uses the worms (they reproduce, you know) to feed his newt and salamander."

IONS



I usually put food waste in my compost bin - why can't I do that anymore?

Food waste in your yard waste compost bin may attract rats, mice, raccoons or possums. We recommend that you compost food waste in a food waste composter. Use a worm bin, Green Cone, a homemade food waste composter, or bury the food waste. We want to help you compost food waste successfully and safely. To find out more about composting food waste, call the Compost Hotline at 633-0224. Request the brochure, "Easy Composting of Food Waste." You can also request design instructions for a worm bin or homemade food waste composter.

My bin works just fine - now what else can I do?

Your "Seattle Composter" is designed to get you started composting. If you want to compost quicker, there are ways to speed things up. For more information on faster composting, call the Compost Hotline, 633-0224, and request the brochure "Home Composting." Other brochures available upon request are "Easy Composting of Food Waste," "The Scoop on Pet Poop," "Mulching with Yard Waste," and "Grasscycling."

COMPOSTING LEAVES

Leaves from deciduous trees and shrubs (those that lose all of their leaves each autumn) are one of the easiest yard wastes to compost - and composted leaves make some of the best compost. Leaves can be composted all by themselves, or with grass clippings. They help the grass clippings break down and prevent clumping and odors. Save autumn leaves to mix with grass clippings in the summer.

Evergreen leaves such as those from Rhododendrons, English Laurels and fir trees have waxy coatings which make them very slow to decompose. Evergreen leaves should only be added to compost piles in small amounts, mixed with grass and other trimmings. Large amounts of Evergreen leaves should be put out for curbside yard waste collection.

COMPOSTING GRASS

Grass clippings make great compost! However, it is better for your grass if you leave clippings on the lawn. You can do this by grasscycling. Grasscycling returns nutrients to the grass, making the lawn healthier, while saving time because you don't have to bag clippings.

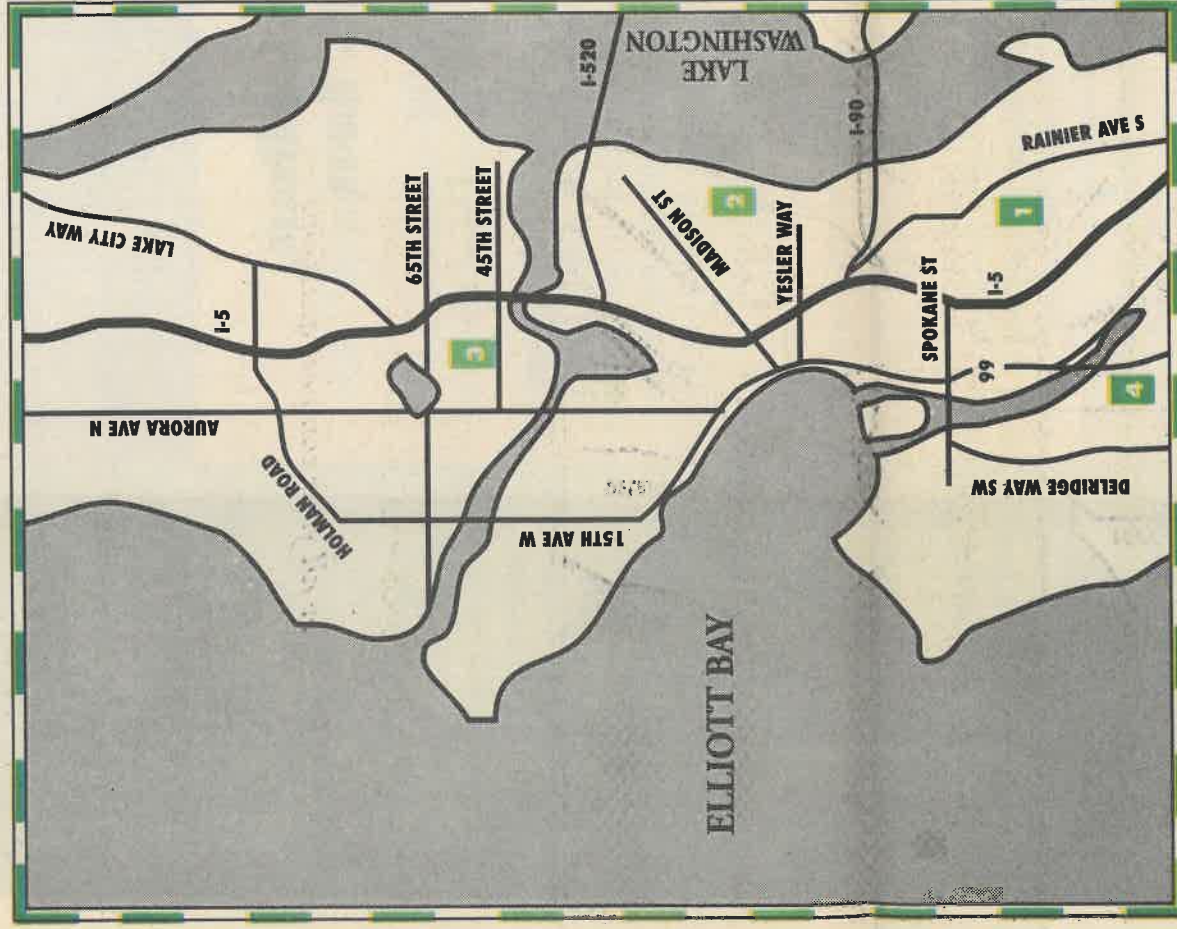
FOR BEST RESULTS IN GRASSCYCLING:

- Cut your lawn every week. Cut no more than one inch of height with each mowing.
- Try to mow when the grass is dry.
- Bag the clippings for composting when the grass is growing quickly or is very wet.
- Check to see if local hardware stores carry a kit for converting your mower into an efficient "mulcher," using a special blade and a shoot cover.
- Purchase a "mulching mower" when you replace your current mower.

CURBSIDE YARD WASTE COLLECTION

If you have not already signed up for curbside yard waste collection, call 684-7600.

SEE COMPOSTING IN ACTION AT SEATTLE'S COMMUNITY COMPOST DEMONSTRATION SITES



**CALL THE COMPOST HOTLINE,
633-0224, TO:**

Answer all your compost questions

Request brochures

*Sign up to volunteer for the Master
Composter Program*

*Find out more about food composting,
grasscycling and mulching*

Order a bin

Sign up for a home visit

THIS MATERIAL CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST TO ACCOMMODATE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BY CALLING 233-7913 (TDD). FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TRANSLATION SERVICES CALL THE SEATTLE SOLID WASTE UTILITY AT 684-7600.

The following Community Compost Demonstration Sites are open to the public seven days a week for self-guided tours. Each site provides information on and examples of at-home compost systems and structures for composting yard debris and food scraps.

Two free workshops are offered frequently from March to October: "Composting for Beginners," for people who are new to home compost; and "Advanced Composting," for those who need assistance with composting problems, compost uses, and trouble-free methods of composting food scraps. Guided tours for groups and school classes are offered by Master Composter volunteers. Call the Compost Hotline (633-0224) for more details about workshops, tours and the Master Composter Program.



1 - BEACON HILL

When: Third Saturday of Month: March 19, April 16, May 21, June 18, July 16, August 20, September 17, October 15

Time: 10 am - Composting for Beginners
11 am - Advanced Composting

Location: El Centro de la Raza
2514 16th Ave. South (at Lander Street)
(Backyard Compost Demonstration Site, located in Northwest corner of grounds, faces 16th Ave. and is adjacent to the North parking lot.)

2 - SEWARD PARK

When: On Sunday: March 6, April 10, May 1, June 5, July 10, August 14, September 11, October 2

Time: 1-2:30 pm - Combined Composting Session

Location: Puget Consumer's Co-op
5041 Wilson Ave So.
(Backyard Compost Demonstration Site is located in back of store. From the parking lot take stairs to the right of building.)

3 - WALLINGFORD

When: Second and Last Saturday of Month: March 12 & 26, April 9 & 30, May 14 & 28, June 11 & 25, July 9 & 30, August 13 & 27, September 10 & 24, October 8 & 29

Time: 10 am - Composting for Beginners
11 am - Advanced Composting

Location: Good Shepherd Center
4649 Sunnyside Ave N.
(Backyard Compost Demonstration Site is located at South end of grounds - just West of buildings that face the Corliss Street entrance.)

4 - WEST SEATTLE

When: First Saturday of Month: March 5, April 2, May 7, June 4, July 2, August 6, September 3, October 1

Time: 10 am - Composting for Beginners
11 am - Advanced Composting

Location: South Seattle Community College Arboretum
1600 16th Avenue SW
(Facing the gardens, take the pathway immediately to the right of the Backyard Compost Demonstration Site sign. Follow the footpath all the way back to the compost site.)