

■ Recycling Online



A Compost Compendium – Part 1

by Roger Guttentag

Well, the holidays are now history and, for many of us, the big question is how many days of snow and ice lie between now and the start of spring. Seems like a perfect time, in my opinion, to think about composting. I consider it regularly since I am in charge of the waste organics in my household, which includes lugging the kitchen food waste bucket to our outdoor composting bin even when there's three feet of snow on the ground. Since the last time I covered this topic was December 2007 (Compost Guides) I thought I would do another survey of composting online resources, especially those that focus on small-scale methods. The ones discussed this month are those that provide a good introduction to either the process, or the overall value economic and environmental value of composting. This survey is by no means an exhaustive one so one important selection criteria was how well the sites listed below provide links to other useful Web-based references.

U.S. Composting Council (USCC)

The USCC is a national trade association representing the U.S.-based composting industry. Their website is a valuable resource for news about events and trends affecting composting as well as for learning more about programs sponsored by the USCC relating to professional training, compost research and promoting the use of composted organics. In particular, I would recommend consulting the USCC's very extensive collection of Web links on 13 topic areas that can be accessed under the Networking section of this site. Topics include associations, backyard composting, periodicals and worm composting.

Composting Council of Canada (CCC)

The CCC serves a similar purpose as the USCC's by providing an entry point for learning more about Canadian composting industries and programs. Some of the information sections, such as "About the Organic Recycling Industry in Canada,"

were still under development when this site was visited for this column's survey. I would recommend using the Compostable.info sub-site. This provides information on the compostable plastic bag certification program such program background, basis for certification and listing of certified products.

Cornell Waste Management Institute (CWMI)

CWMI is a program within Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences for providing training, research and technical assistance on issues relating to the management of organic residuals. This includes a strong focus on organic materials management from non-agricultural sources. The composting section of this site is divided into six topic areas including Health and Safety, Large Scale Composting and Small Scale Composting. There is also a link to a separate listing of online composting fact sheets that can be downloaded. CWMI recently launched a new website on vermicomposting that can be accessed from their home page.

CalRecycle Organic Materials Management (COOM)

The COOM is a very extensive collection of information resources on all aspects of small and large scale composting though some of it, such as regulatory issues and producer locations, are specific to California. These resources are organized within four main tabbed categories: Compost, Landscaping, Technologies and Pests/Threats. The topics associated with each tab are shown as you place your cursor over the tab label. Each topic listing is a link to a detailed discussion such as home composting, compost and erosion control or conversion technologies. Links to other

Web Address Directory

CalRecycle Organic Materials
Management

www.calrecycle.ca.gov/Organics/
www.compostable.info

Composting Council of Canada
Cornell Waste Management
Institute

<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/>
<http://tinyurl.com/klickitat>
<http://tinyurl.com/SeaTilth>
www.compostingcouncil.org

Klickitat County
Seattle Tilth

U.S. Composting Council
University of Wisconsin –
Solid & Hazardous Waste
Education Center

<http://tinyurl.com/UWwaste>

resources and publications on organics management can be found in a navigation menu on the right side of the COOM home page.

University of Wisconsin – Solid & Hazardous Waste Education Center (SHWEC)

One of the missions of SHWEC is to provide education and training in support of both small and large scale composting programs. Information on small scale composting can be found by clicking on the Recycling link of the Program Areas navigation menu and then selecting either the link to Publications or Program Resources. The Publications page has links to numerous online factsheets on composting, many of them specifically on how to construct various types of composting bins. If you select the Program Resources section, click on the link to the Recycling Managers Corner and then look for the drop-down menu for Composting Resources. Select the link to the Wisconsin Master Composter Resource page to access a variety of online instructional documents such as the home study guide. Also notable are factsheets to assist instruction on best practices for compost education.

Seattle Tilth (ST)

ST is a non-profit organization devoted to teaching and promoting organic gardening practices. This includes a section devoted to instructional clearly-written and well-illustrated pages and downloadable factsheets on a wide range of small scale composting and vermicomposting methods. Topics covered include descriptions of the composting process, troubleshooting techniques, how to build various types of composting and worm bins and how to use the finished material in your garden.

Klickitat County

You can think of composting as a form of biological cooking, where the goal is to achieve the optimal carbon to nitrogen (C:N) ratio. However, achieving this ratio can be tricky depending on the materials you need to compost, making the process seem more like an art than science. While there are lots of rules of thumb on how to achieve the right C:N, Klickitat County (Washington) has made the process a lot simpler with their online Compost Mix Calculator. It's very easy to use. Select from a drop-down menu

a material (like grass clippings) and the estimated number of cubic feet to be composted. You then continue to add other materials and their estimated quantities until you achieve an overall C:N in the 25 to 30 range. For example, the calculator estimates that 5 cubic feet of compacted grass and 20 cubic feet has an overall C:N ratio of 28 (to put another way, use 5 parts of grass to 20 parts leaves). If you are interested, there is a link to an explanation of the calculator's methodology and information sources for its calculations.

Next Month

Part 2 of this composting Web survey will concentrate on sites that describe examples of how composting practices on a variety of production scales are being encouraged here in the United States and in other countries.

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