

# Recycling Online



In last month's column, I discussed Web resources that provided general overviews on composting, especially where it concerned small scale practices. However, as we all know, having the technical knowledge is not enough. There must also be a way to get it to the right users who can be counted on or trained to apply it effectively. So, in this month's column we will take a look at some examples of how the Web is used to communicate about – as well as motivate community participation in – composting.

## Composting Urban Style

Organic waste recovery within highly-urbanized communities is very challenging due to the high waste generation patterns from both residential and commercial activities, coupled with significant constraints, such as limited open space options for handling this material locally. Nonetheless, most large cities in the U.S. do promote organic waste recovery on various levels which are illustrated by the New York

## A compost compendium – Part 2

by Roger Guttentag

City WasteLess (NYCWL), Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) and University of Illinois Extension (ULE) sites. Residents and businesses of Seattle have the most composting choices, including curbside collections as well as on-site methods. Information on all these options is provided on the SPU site. What is especially notable is the effort that is made to enlist the help of volunteers in support of these composting programs. Apartment and condo residents are encouraged by the SPU to join Friends of Recycling and Composting through a financial credit to their utility bills to help with educating their neighbors and reducing contamination problems. In addition, experienced residential composters can join the King County (where Seattle is located) Master Recycler Composter (KCMRC) volunteer program to lend their assistance. The KCMRC website is primarily open only to enrolled volunteers but there is enough information on the site to give you an idea as to what they do and how you can join.

Unlike the SPU, the New York City Department of Sanitation (NYCDOS) composting operations are limited to composting fallen leaves, street tree debris and Christmas trees on two sites. However, the NYCWL site also describes the NYC Composting Project that is funded by the NYCDOS. This consists of one

community composting demonstration site in each of the City's five boroughs operated by non-profit organizations such like the Brooklyn or Bronx Botanical Gardens. The function of these sites is to illustrate different composting methods that can be practiced by residents or businesses and to offer educational workshops geared to various constituencies such as educators or master composters. Finally, the ULE site exemplifies the type of composting education and outreach that is focused principally on residential home composting. This provides information on composting using microbial- or worm-based techniques, composting bin designs, suggested composting "recipes" and links to further resources.

## Schools and Composting

Schools, especially higher education institutions, represent excellent opportunities to practice as well as teach composting as part of a larger waste reduction program. There are now hundreds of college and university campuses that recover their organic wastes originating from their food services, residential dorms, or landscaping activities through either onsite or offsite composting systems. A good sampling of how this is done can be found by searching through the Campus Sustainability Case Studies data base on the National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology site. Select "Browse by Topic" and then select "Composting" from a drop-down menu. This will then bring up a list of campus case studies with a brief summary on each one. To learn more about a particular program, click on the "More About This Project" link which will then lead to a detailed fact sheet that includes background descriptions, discussion of program goals and accomplishments and contact information. Another good source of campus composting case studies is the College and University Recycling Coalition's December 2010 Webinar on this topic that includes a series of slide presentations and links to recent *BioCycle* articles on college composting programs.

## Web Address Directory

ADAS Composting Research Project	<a href="http://www.compostresearch.com/">www.compostresearch.com/</a>
College and University Recycling Coalition – Composting Webinar	<a href="http://www.curc3r.org/webinars-composting.php">www.curc3r.org/webinars-composting.php</a>
Compost Your Matter	<a href="http://mastercomposter.us/">http://mastercomposter.us/</a>
Confessions of a Composter	<a href="http://confessionsofacomposter.blogspot.com/">http://confessionsofacomposter.blogspot.com/</a>
Harvard University – Organic Landscaping	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/HarvardOrganics">http://tinyurl.com/HarvardOrganics</a>
King County Master Recycler Composter Volunteer	<a href="http://www.mrcvolunteer.org/">www.mrcvolunteer.org/</a>
National Wildlife Federation – Campus Ecology – Case Studies	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/nwfcampus">http://tinyurl.com/nwfcampus</a>
NYC WasteLess – Composting	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/NYCompost">http://tinyurl.com/NYCompost</a>
Seattle Public Utilities – Food and Yard	<a href="http://tinyurl.com/SeaFoodYard">http://tinyurl.com/SeaFoodYard</a>
The Compost Club	<a href="http://compostclub.org/">http://compostclub.org/</a>
University of Illinois Extension – Chicago Home Composting	<a href="http://urbanext.illinois.edu/homecomposting/">http://urbanext.illinois.edu/homecomposting/</a>
WASTE – Organic Waste	<a href="http://www.waste.nl/page/245">www.waste.nl/page/245</a>

Finally, I've included a link to Harvard's Organic Landscaping page because of its detailed examination of composting's role in this project. Also interesting is their descriptions of how to create compost teas as well as recommended recipes tailored for different landscaping needs.

## Let's Blog about Composting

The blogosphere's share of the Web continues to expand due to blogging's capacity to combine one's passions on specific topics with the Web's information-sharing clout. So, of course, it's not surprising that blogs about composting are now becoming more prevalent. I've included links to Confessions of a Composter, Compost Your Matter and the Compost Club as interesting examples of these kind of blogs developed by people who are active in government, environmental entrepreneurship and non-profit advocacy. They all have a similar structure that consists of a mix of local news, information sharing, personal opinions and the promotion of specific events or projects. What's nice about them is that while you are learning more composting, you're also exposed to an emotional aura that makes composting appear to be, well,

just a lot of *fun*. Hopefully, we see more blogs of this type in the future.

## Composting Abroad

Nearly all the sites I have profiled are concerned with composting organic wastes generated within the United and Canada. However, we should not ignore the efforts being made for determining how composting can be profitably applied for managing organic wastes in other parts of the world. Two examples I have listed at the end of this column are the ADAS Composting Research Project and the WASTE Organic waste sites. The former is a UK-based consultancy that conducted a series of compost research projects funded through that country's landfill tax. These projects were concerned with investigating the efficacy of different cleaning methods as part of compost production, and the value of using finished composts from various sources for agricultural production and land restoration. Descriptions of the various experimental trials that were run and final reports on their results can be downloaded from this site. WASTE, in contrast, is a Dutch consultancy that concentrates on improving urban waste management practices for low-income populations in developing

economies such as those located in Africa and Asia. Unlike developed economies such as the U.S., the municipal waste from these areas can have a much higher organic content, while the public service infrastructure for managing it can be more rudimentary, or even absent, posing significant public health and environmental problems. The WASTE site has links to reports that explore how composting can be used to recover organic wastes and to accomplish other useful social missions such as supporting local economic development or urban agriculture.

## Finishing Up

Hopefully this brief survey provides some insights into the wide variety of ways that composting can be promoted, supported, implemented and practiced within our communities. The bottom line is that there is no one right way for boosting composting rates so my suggestion is, where possible, do them all.

---

Roger M. Guttentag is a recycling and solid waste consultant located in Harleysville, Pennsylvania. He can be contacted at (610) 584-8836 or rguttentag@comcast.net.