

Composting conserves landfill space, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and creates nutrient rich soil. The City of Vancouver engages residents to work toward these goals, offering educational programs, subsidized home composters, and a yard waste composting facility.

# City-Wide Composting

## ORGANIC MATTERS

Long used by subsistence farmers and home gardeners to create soil high in nutrients, composting is now also a tool for reducing the amount of organic waste going into landfills. When organic materials are left to decompose in landfills, they create methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Knowing that landfill space is at a premium, and aiming to become the greenest city in the world by 2020, the City of Vancouver made composting an important part of its waste reduction strategy.

The City has implemented a variety of composting programs that are successfully diverting food scraps and yard trimmings out of the waste stream – freeing up capacity at landfills and building better topsoil.

## CLEANING UP THE WASTE STREAM

Most urban organic waste can be removed from the waste stream through composting infrastructure, programs and education. Over the past 20 years, the City has pursued this consistently through:

- promotion and education on home composting and collection of yard trimmings and leaves, through City Farmer, the Compost Demonstration Garden, and a compost hotline
- drop-off depots and residential collection of yard trimmings and leaves
- construction of a \$2.4 million compost facility at the landfill
- subsidizing compost bins for home owners and compact worm composting bins for apartment dwellers

## THE CITY COMPOST PROCESS: TURNING YARD TRIMMINGS INTO HIGH VALUE COMPOST

Yard and garden trimmings (grass, leaves, plant debris) are screened for metal using a magnet, ground up, and arranged in long piles called windrows. Over the next six months, the windrows are periodically turned to maintain optimum temperature, oxygen level and moisture content. The finished material is then screened for plastic and oversized pieces, before distribution as compost.



### Rethinking and Reusing Garden Waste

Each year, the City's compost facility takes in over 45,000 tonnes of yard and garden trimmings from residences, streets and parks, and creates 18,000 tonnes of compost. The compost is used to enrich the soil in City parks and boulevards, and every May residents are encouraged to pick up a free cubic metre of compost.

### Grow Natural: Save Time, Money and the Environment

Since 1990, the City of Vancouver has promoted backyard composting by distributing compost bins designed for urban areas. This discourages composting in open heaps of kitchen and yard wastes, which generate unpleasant odours and rodent problems.

Backyard compost bins have already been distributed to some 42,000 Vancouver households that have yard space – about 46 per cent of such households now use backyard composters, which diverts an estimated 6,000 tonnes of organic materials from the landfill every year. The City provides apartment dwellers with more-compact worm composters, including a one-hour instructional workshop at the Compost Garden, at nominal cost.

The City extensively promotes and supports home composting, primarily through a contract with City Farmer, a non-profit urban agriculture advocacy society. City Farmer runs the Vancouver Compost Demonstration Garden and the Regional Compost Hotline, and promotes home composting through a variety of direct social marketing methods. It interacts each year with about 16,000 people, including school children, seniors and the disabled.

