

## Internal Web Pages for CT DEEP Office Composting Program\*

Welcome | Program at a Glance | Bucket Basics | FAQ | Floor Reps |  
Don't Let the Bugs Go Hungry | Volunteer to Turn | Volunteer to Harvest |  
Home Composting Resources

\*Pages are from November, 2013

### Welcome to Your Compost Connection Composting Has A-Peel !

Since September of 1997, DEEP employees have had the unique opportunity to participate in an Office Food Scrap Composting Demonstration. Originally introduced as a Model Agency Pollution Prevention Initiative, the program has received wide acceptance as a way for us to reduce waste from our workplace, increase our recycling rate, and encourage folks to begin a compost pile at home. The success we have enjoyed is a direct result of the volunteerism displayed by the employees who manage and oversee the project, and by those who deposit their food scraps into the compost buckets.



Before



After

**Food Scraps Composted So Far = 112,371 pounds (56.4 tons)\***

\*based on an average of actual weight-based data from the first four years  
of the program of 500 lbs/month or 6,000 lbs/year

#### Information about the composting program at DEEP Headquarters

[Program at a Glance](#) - A summary of how the program works and its benefits.

[Floor Representatives](#) - A list of staff who coordinate composting efforts on each floor.

[Volunteering](#) - A description of what Compost Turners and Harvesters do and how you can volunteer to be one.

[Compost Bucket Basics](#) - A list of what can and cannot go into the compost collection bucket.

[Home Composing Resources](#) - A list of books, videos and websites to help you start or enhance your home compost pile.

## The Program at a Glance



The [Floor Representatives](#) are the backbone of the compost program at 79 Elm and are responsible for recruiting staff volunteers to help in the daily operation of the program. Employees have been asked to put all of their food scraps into the silver [containers](#) labeled "COMPOST" located in the break rooms. At the end of the day, the cleaning staff empties it into the compost bin in back of the building, rinses the bucket and returns it to the break room. Every morning, a "[Compost Turner](#)" operates the auger that mixes and aerates the compost inside the bin. This accelerates the decomposition process and helps maintain optimum conditions for the microorganisms that are breaking down the organic materials.

Periodically, about every 4 - 6 months, a crew of "[Compost Harvesters](#)" removes the compost from the bin, screens it to get the lumps out, and prepares the bin for another batch. The compost is taken to our DEEP sawmill in Portland where it finishes composting over another few months. By the time it is ready to use, the compost has reduced in volume to only a small pile, about enough to fill three large trash barrels. The Parks Division identifies a state park that is installing or renovating a garden and the compost is given to them for use in their landscape beautification programs. In past years, the compost has been used in our front garden at 79 Elm, in a new butterfly garden at Dinosaur State Park, and in general garden renovation at Penwood State Park.

The benefits of composting at 79 Elm include reducing the amount of trash we send to the burn plant, increasing our recycling rate, producing a high quality compost, and creating an example of pollution prevention and recycling for employees, visitors and other building managers. So please, help turn our spoils into soil, and put your food scraps in the compost can...because a rind is a terrible thing to waste!

To learn more about the program, or to find out where you can get information about starting a [compost pile at home](#), just select a topic in the side bar.

## Compost Bucket Basics: What Should Go Into the Compost Can?

Everyone can participate in the compost program by placing their leftover food scraps from meals eaten at work into the compost collection buckets located in the break rooms. It is very important, however, that only the appropriate items go into the bucket. Because we have a special composting vessel designed to handle institutional organics, we are putting **ALL** of our food scraps in the collection bucket, even meat and dairy products which normally would not be appropriate in a home composting setting. In addition, certain paper items, such as coffee filters, tea bags, and brown paper towels from the break rooms are being included. **Glass, metal, and plastic should never be put in the collection bucket. Nor should items labeled "biodegradable" or "compostable".** These items do not decompose adequately, or at all, in our composting system and they make the compost look trashy. DEEP Volunteers eventually have to screen them out of the finished product. **When in doubt, leave it out!**



### COMPOSTABLES

- Any fruit or vegetable such as apple cores, banana peels & citrus rinds
- Coffee grounds and filters; tea bags, wooden coffee stirrers
- Bread, rolls, bagels & muffins with or without butter, cream cheese, mayo, etc.
- Pizza; popcorn; sandwiches, and any other food item
- Chinese, Thai; Italian and other vendor or restaurant foods
- Salad with or without dressing
- Pasta with or without sauce
- Cold cuts, meat, chicken, fish, cheese, yogurt, eggs
- Brown paper towels and napkins (from break rooms only). **NO** white towels
- Flowers, plants (Without pots and disease free. Cut vines into pieces.)



### NON-COMPOSTABLES

- **NO** Glass
- **NO** Metal, such as bottle tops, aluminum foil, soda cans, twist ties
- **NO** Plastic, such as sandwich bags, plastic wrap, styrofoam containers, plastic straws and stirrers
- **NO** Single serve containers, such as juice boxes and milk cartons
- **NO** Microwave meal trays/packaging, or take-out containers
- **NO** Popcorn bags, candy wrappers, snack packaging, or coffee creamers
- **NO** Paper or styrofoam cups
- **NO** Liquids
- **NO** Newspaper, office paper, magazines, or cardboard
- **NO** Diseased Plants
- **NO** White paper towels
- **NO** Items labeled "Compostable" or "Biodegradable" (see below)

## Common Questions About Our Compost Program

### Why can't we put everything into the compost can?

The compost we make is used at our state parks, so let's keep it clean. Putting glass, metal, plastic and other **non-compostables** in the can makes the compost look trashy because they **do not decompose**, and are unacceptable for garden beds. It also causes more work for the DEEP volunteers who manage this very unique program, and who have to screen inappropriate items out of our compost. **When in doubt, leave it out!**

### What about those items labeled "Compostable" or "Biodegradable"?

Please DO NOT add items like cups, utensils, take-out containers, trays, packaging or wrappers that are labeled "Compostable" or "Biodegradable". Although they may eventually degrade in a *commercial* composting facility, **they will not break-down adequately or rapidly enough in our batch-style composting system**. In addition, there is a lot of "greenwashing" throughout the packaging industry making claims about degradability that may not be true. And finally, the plastic film (bags) that carry these claims will get tangled in the mechanical parts that turn our compost.

### Can we really put ALL our food waste in the compost can?

Yes. Because we have a special composting vessel designed to handle institutional organics, we are putting ALL of our food scraps in the collection bucket, even meat and dairy products which normally would not be appropriate in a home composting setting. In addition, certain paper items, such as coffee filters, tea bags, and brown paper towels from the break rooms are being included.

### What about plants?

Plants must be disease-free and without pots. Please cut big or viney plants like ivy or philodendron into 8" pieces or smaller to prevent them from wrapping around the compost vessel auger.

### Why can't we put white paper towels in the compost?

White paper towels and napkins don't seem to decompose as well as brown towels and affects the quality of the compost. White paper is bleached during the paper-making process and may contain residue that we don't want in our compost. Please cut brown paper towels into 18" pieces or smaller.

**More Questions? Please call K.C. Alexander at x-3239.**

**Find additional information on InSide DEEP under Quick Links/Compost Connection**

## Floor Representatives

Floor Reps are the backbone of the program and are responsible for being the go-to persons for compost related questions, comments or concerns on their respective floors. So, please give them a call and volunteer to be a Compost Turner! Many hands make for light work.

Floor	Representative	Bureau/Division	Phone
Store	Vacant*		
First	Vacant*		
Second	Jim Creighton	Water/WPED	X-3681
Third	Pete Spangenberg	Water/Inland Resources	X-3870
Fourth	K.C. Alexander	Waste/Recycling	X-3239
Fifth	Vacant*		
Sixth	Vacant*		

\* The Store, first, fifth, and sixth floors do not have a coordinator at this time. Anyone wishing to volunteer please contact the Program Coordinator, K.C. Alexander, at x-3239

## Don't Let a Bug Go Hungry...Volunteer!

We need more volunteers to help keep our compost bugs happy and healthy! Here are a few ways that you can participate:

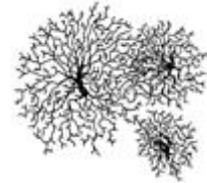
- Put all your food scraps into the [Compost Collection Bucket](#)
- Volunteer to become a [Compost Turner](#)
- Volunteer to become a [Compost Harvester](#)

"Hey Wyatt,  
have you eaten supper yet?"



"Yup, that nice cleaning person  
just dropped a whole bucket of  
food scraps over there by the loading  
hatch."

"Food is great,  
but will someone please  
open the window? I need some air."



"Don't worry, tomorrow morning a  
DEEP volunteer will come down and  
give us a turn."

"Ya know, some day those volunteers  
will empty this composter and we'll get  
to live at one of Connecticut's beautiful  
state parks.  
Until then, I hope they take good care of  
us."





## Volunteer to be a Compost Turner!

Our compost gets turned on a daily basis in order to incorporate the previous day's additions and to provide oxygen to the microbes that are breaking down the organics. A motorized auger that digs into the compost and mixes everything together does most of the work. The Compost Turner supplies the elbow grease that moves the auger and lid around the circumference of the compost bin, twice. It is not difficult to turn, as a pole in the center of the bin supports the motor and lid. The Compost Turner is also responsible for checking the drain valves and making one last effort to pull out plastics and other uncompostable items from the bin with a pair of large tongs.

Each Compost Turner signs up to perform these tasks for one week at a time, turning every day for the whole week. At the end of the week, he/she passes the power cord on to the next person on the list, and so on. There are plenty of volunteers to fill in if someone can't turn each day during their week. To date, we have 18 dedicated Compost Turners, which means they each turn for one week about every five months. Each turning takes approximately 15 minutes and does not have to be done during breaks.

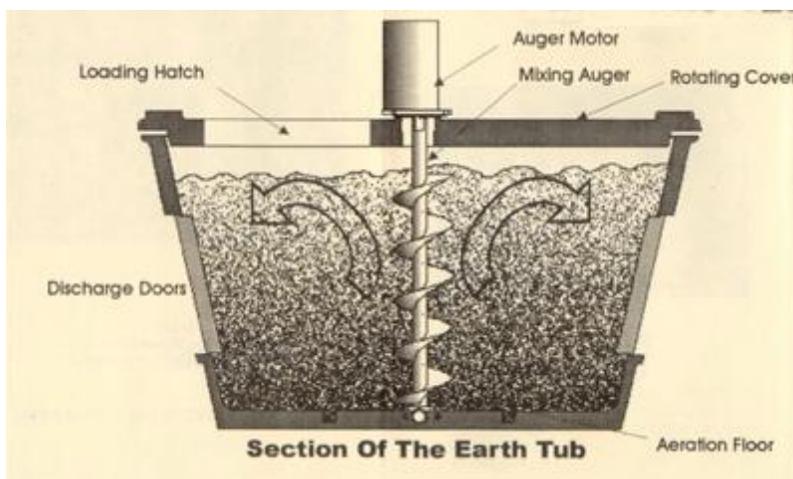
To sign up to be a Compost Turner, clear it with your supervisor and then contact K.C. Alexander at X-3239. We'll get you trained and you can begin to do the earth a good turn!



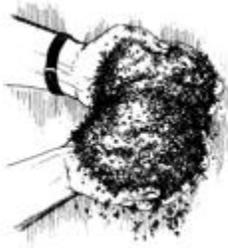
Earth Tub composter behind 79 Elm St.



Turning the compost



## Volunteer to be a Compost Harvester!



Harvesting our compost is a rewarding and satisfying event to experience. It represents the culmination of the effort and dedication on the part of everyone who participates in the program. About every 4 - 6 months, a handful of Compost Harvesters gather out back to empty the compost bin. Using rakes, shovels and wheelbarrows, they transport the compost to a flatbed truck waiting at the end of the loading dock. They then screen the compost, measure the volume and record the weight. After that, they hose-down the bin, make any repairs, perform general maintenance, and fill it back up with clean wood shavings in preparation for the next batch. It's not easy work, and you can get a little dirty, but it is very rewarding. Most Harvesters bring a change of clothes or coveralls and a pair of work gloves. The whole process takes about two hours and usually is scheduled for 9 am to 11 am on a Monday or Tuesday morning. To volunteer to be a Compost Harvester, clear it with your supervisor and then contact K.C. Alexander at x3239. Your name will be put on a call-back list and you will be notified a few weeks before the next scheduled harvest.



Pulling compost out of the composter



Screening compost



Cleaning inside of composter



Emptying bags of wood shavings into composter



Compost piles curing in Portland



Compost used in butterfly garden at Dinosaur State Park

## Want More Information About How You Can Begin to Compost at Home?



There are a tremendous number of resources on home composting - books, videos, the Internet. The DEEP Recycling Program has a [brochure](#), [fact sheet](#), and a how-to [video](#), "Compost... Turning Your Spoils to Soil" available for free download on our website. For those of you who have no space outside to compost, you may want to try composting indoors with red wiggler worms also referred to as "vermicomposting". The Recycling Program has information on this topic as well. For more information, please contact K.C. Alexander at X-3239.

Here is list of our favorite composting resources to help get you started.

### Books

**"Easy Composting - Environmentally Friendly Gardening"** 1992. Ortho Books. 96 pages, many color photographs and excellent presentation. About \$9.00, found in gardening centers and home improvement centers where other Ortho Books are sold.

**"Composting to Reduce the Waste Stream - A Guide to Small Scale Food and Yard Waste Composting"** 1991. Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service. 44 pages, black & white print, simple explanations and many diagrams. \$6.00. Available through NRAES, 152 Riley Robb Hall, Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701 (607) 255-7654.

**"The Real Dirt - The Complete Guide to Backyard, Balcony and Apartment Composting"** 1992. Mark Cullen, Lorraine Johnson. Penguin Books. 172 pages, practical how-to advice, activities for children, bin plans, FAQ's, etc. About \$15.00 in bookstores.

**"Worms Eat My Garbage"** .. Mary Appelhof. Flowerfield Enterprises/Flower Press. Newly revised and updated, this new edition gives even more information on how to set up and maintain a worm composting system than the popular first edition. This book is useful for the home vermicomposter. It tells how to meet the needs of worms, what kinds of foods you can feed your worms, harvesting worms and castings, making potting soil from the vermicompost, and growing healthy plants from recycled food wastes. \$12.95 in bookstores or direct from the authors website at [www.wormwoman.com](http://www.wormwoman.com)

### Videos

The Recycling Program has a copy of these videos in their library and staff may borrow them for up to one week. Contact K.C. Alexander at X-3239.

**"Home Composting - Turning Your Spoils to Soil"** CT DEEP. 17 minutes. A basic how-to video that teaches you what makes compost happen, what items you should and shouldn't compost, how to build your own compost bin, the "recipe" for great compost, and how to use your compost. May be borrowed from main branch CT libraries, DEEP Recycling Program, [downloaded](#) from the Internet, or purchased from the DEEP Store for \$8.00

**"Compost - Truth or Consequences"** The Cornell Waste Management Institute. 15 minutes. Designed for people who would like to take the mystery out of home composting. The information is presented in an informal, entertaining way to make learning about composting fun. [Available](#) as a free download or from the Cornell University Press Services, P.O. Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14850-6525 Phone: (800) 666-2211.

**"Wormania!"** Mary Appelhof and Billy B. Brennan. A Flowerfield Enterprises production. 26 min. VHS video with 48 page teaching guide. Grade. 4 and up. Developed partially under a grant from the National Science Foundation to do videomicroscopy of live earthworms, the video incorporates footage of worms in their natural habitat and in the laboratory. One of the most captivating sequences is the baby worm hatching from its cocoon. Viewers learn about worms--how they move, their role in soil ecology, how worms breed, and how to set up a worm bin for composting organic waste. \$34.90 + \$4 shipping. Available through the authors website at [www.wormwoman.com](http://www.wormwoman.com)

## Websites

Don't forget to check out the links that these sites provide to other composting and composting equipment home pages. Many gardening websites also have information on composting.

### Home Composting

[www.mastercomposter.com](http://www.mastercomposter.com) (The Website for Home Composting) Has all the basics on home composting, but of particular interest is the Compost Message Board where you can ask questions and receive answers. You can also view archived Q & A. The Site Map is useful in finding what you want at this site.



[www.oldgrowth.org/compost/](http://www.oldgrowth.org/compost/) (Composting Resource Page)

Also offers the basics plus a bulletin board called Composter's Forum which is broken down into four different forums on home composting, large scale composting, vermi (worm) composting and composting toilets.

[www.compostinfo.com](http://www.compostinfo.com) (Florida's On-Line Compost Center, also called The Virtual Composter)

This site is unique in that it offers some interactive features such as a virtual pile that will calculate your carbon:nitrogen ratio, and a FAQ Quiz. It has tutorials on home composting, directions on building bins, where to find manufactured bins, and links to other interesting sites and sources.

### Vermicomposting (worm composting)



[www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html#wormcompost](http://www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html#wormcompost) This site is published by City Farmer, Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture. It includes basic how-to information and has a worm forum where you can ask questions and research archived FAQ's. Links to other worm sites.

[www.jetcompost.com/burrow/index.html](http://www.jetcompost.com/burrow/index.html) "The Burrow" has a vermicomposting primer, plans for a worm bin, FAQ's, a bibliography of worm related books and more. Links to other worm sites.