



Summer 2011

Community



Composter

550 Mecham Road, Petaluma CA 94952

(707) 578-5459 www.sonoma.compost.com

Why Sonoma Compost?

Sonoma Compost Company has been feeding soils for over 25 years, creating quality organic compost and mulches. These soil enriching products are subject to stringent quality controls and are valued by Sonoma County



gardeners, landscapers, and the commercial agricultural community. Sonoma Compost products are listed by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) as allowed for use in organic agriculture and select products are Biodynamic® Certified by Demeter.

Processed Locally

Located at the Sonoma County Disposal Site north of Petaluma, collection vehicles residents and landscapers deliver yard debris to Sonoma Compost for processing. landfill in co-collection vehicles. According to a recent alternatives analysis performed by the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency, in-county operations utilizing Sonoma Compost was the most cost effective means of processing local organics.

Produced Locally

Sonoma Compost encourages the concept to avoid producing waste in the first place. Plan ahead so that you plant appropriate sized landscaping that fits your space. This helps to avoid the need for excess pruning, as well as saving the valuable time wielding your clippers! Similarly, planning your food purchases helps assure that you buy only what you need, thereby avoiding at least some of the discards from wasted and unused food.

If you are able to compost at your home or business, you help to conserve the resources used in transporting yard trimmings and food scraps to a compost facility as well as

the costs associated with disposal and processing. Also, producing your own compost is satisfying and it returns nutrients to your garden and landscape naturally.

For those unable to compost, placing yard trimming and vegetative food scraps in your yard debris cart, or delivering materials directly to a compost facility, assures this material will be processed and turned into soil enhancing amendments.

Grown Locally

Sonoma Compost is the local solution to the processing and management of yard debris and

Compost Local... continued to page 2



What is all the fuss about

"COMPOSTABLE" PLASTICS?

Increasingly, consumers are seeing products and packaging choices that are labeled compostable or biodegradable. On the surface, this seems like it might be a step in the right direction in this world of shrinking landfills. And most of us would likely agree that alternatives to conventional plastic products are preferred. But what is the back story of these products? Are we really making an environmentally preferable choice when



purchasing them? How do we best manage these products after they have been used?

Single -Use Products

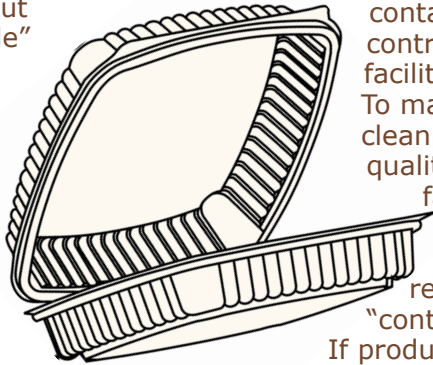
When we purchase many of these "compostable" products, we are still buying single-use products, designed to be thrown away after one-time use. By marketing them as compostable, manufacturers hope that we will be seduced by the idea that these products might compost in

Bio-plastics... continued to page 2

Bio-plastics... from page 1

the landfill or be sent to compost facilities and therefore are an environmentally friendly choice.

In the hierarchy of best end-use, however, it is preferable to buy and use durable goods. Real cups, silverware, to-go containers, water bottles, and such, can be used over and over. Granted, sometimes that is not an option. But "compostable" may not be the best choice when we do need to utilize disposable goods. See the inset for some items to consider when making purchases of single-use products.



meet the standards for efficient compost facilities.

Identify Yourself!

Bioplastics look very similar, in some cases identical, to conventional plastics. This makes identification and contamination control at compost facilities difficult. To maintain a clean stream, quality compost facilities hand-sort and remove any "contaminants". If products are not clearly identifiable as acceptable at compost facilities, these bioplastics end up in the landfill anyway.

Presently, the National Organics Program (NOP) does not allow synthetics as a feed stock for for

Single-Use Compostable Products

For single-use products that truly are compostable, both in your home compost pile or by Sonoma Compost, please consider products made of these materials:

- Bagasse (Sugar Cane) and Wheat straw
- Banana Leaf

The following can also be composted:

- Uncoated paper plates such as Chinette
- Uncoated muffin cups
- Paper towels and napkins

Please do not dispose of items made of the following products in your home or municipal compost. They should be disposed of in the regular trash:

- PLA (Polylactic Acid) (to-go containers, cups, plates)
- Bio- and other compostable bags
- Corn, soybean or petroleum based bioplastics such as plates, cups, straws utensils, and packaging bags.

Corn, Petroleum or both?

Initially, many "compostable" or bio-plastic products were made of corn starch. Corn is a government subsidized crop that uses very high levels of chemical fertilizers in its production and may be genetically modified. There are still unanswered questions as to the environmental consequences to the food chain, wildlife and waterway impacts of these crops.

Now, some bioplastics are actually made using petroleum products. It seems we are back to square one with utilizing oil for the production of the new generation of bio-plastics.

Bioplastics, whether produced with corn or petroleum, are problematic in regional compost programs. First of all, many do not decompose in a time frame that is realistic for regional composters, and some items, specifically corn-based utensils, do not appear to decompose even over a long period of time. This creates problems for the facility as well as the end-user, who will not want uncomposted plastics in their garden mix. For products to be truly compostable, they must

Compost Local... from page 1

other organics in the County. Material that is generated in the County is processed locally and returned to Sonoma County vineyards, farms, schools, and to local landscapers and gardeners. In addition, many thousands of yards of compost and mulch are utilized by the cities and the County each year for municipal projects.

In 2010, Sonoma Compost donated over 800 cubic yards of compost to local schools and other organizations such as Shone Farm, Daily Acts and Sonoma State University, and

organic agriculture. As a result, bioplastics jeopardize the organic listings for facilities that strictly adhere to guidelines for products for use in organic agriculture.

conducted workshops with Sonoma and Marin Master Gardeners, Santa Rosa Junior College, Marin and Napa Bay-Friendly Landscape Maintenance Training and Qualification Program.

The flow of material into the Sonoma Compost facility is a vital element to the production of these locally produced and locally marketed materials. Sonoma Compost has been an active and engaged partner in County efforts to meet the diversion goals of the community and produce high-end materials for a fair price.



Food Scrap Composting

Taking Organics Recycling to the Next Level

A Sonoma County Waste Characterization Study in 2007 identified organics as the next single largest component of the waste stream still being landfilled. Just over 20% of the overall material going to the landfill is food scraps from residents and businesses. Sonoma Compost has worked with the County to implement programs that target the organics that can be directed to composting facilities.

Presently, all Sonoma County residents can place vegetative food scraps in their home yard debris container and set it out for weekly collection as part of their collection service. This material is then delivered, along with yard waste, to Sonoma Compost where it is composted into high quality composts and mulches, used in backyard gardens, by commercial growers, landscapers and vineyards.

Businesses and commercial kitchens are also able to compost vegetative food scraps. In some jurisdictions, the local hauler will provide restaurants, caterers, and institutions with yard waste carts for collection of food scraps with residential yard waste. Businesses recognize that taking advantage of this composting opportunity is a cost saving measure as well as an opportunity to help the County meet waste reduction goals.

Robert Barry, executive chef of Merrill Gardens in Sonoma said the reduction in garbage has been significant. "We used to have a one cubic yard bin picked up 2-3 times per week. Now we are down to one time per week and it is usually less than half full."

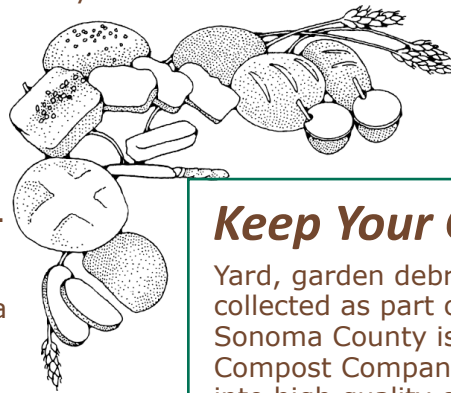
Waste management officials say it's a win-win situation: less

waste ends up in the landfill, which helps the county meet its increasing waste diversion goals. It's also good for the environment. Food scraps and yard trimmings that end up in the landfill create methane due to anaerobic decomposition, which, when not captured, is released as a greenhouse gas that is 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide. But when these organics are turned into compost under aerobic conditions, this methane release doesn't occur.

businesses can include bread, pasta, coffee grounds, eggshells and uncoated paper such as paper towels and napkins. Even wilted flowers can be composted.

"We launched this program in spring, and in just a few months, we had a majority of commercial kitchens in the City of Sonoma on board," said Alan Siegle, co-owner of Sonoma Compost. "Folks are excited about food scrap composting. We are working with other cities now as well to get this program implemented."

See www.sonomacompost.com to view a YouTube video of the project on their websites.



Besides vegetable trimmings, participating

Keep Your Green Clean

Yard, garden debris and kitchen scraps collected as part of curbside collection in Sonoma County is delivered to Sonoma Compost Company, where they are turned into high quality composts and mulches used by home gardeners, landscape contractors, organic farmers and vineyards throughout the County.

Each load of material delivered to the facility is hand-sorted to remove contaminants, such as plastic garden pots, garden hoses, plastic bags, dimensional lumber and other prohibited items that might be mixed in with yard debris loads. Please do your part to "Keep Your Green Clean". The materials you set out for collection are destined for great things!



Accepted Materials:

Yard & Garden Debris

landscape prunings
garden trimmings

grass clippings
weeds

Kitchen scraps

kitchen prep scraps
breads & baked goods
egg shells

fruits & vegetable trimmings
grains & pasta
coffee grounds & tea bags

Uncoated paper products

paper plates, napkins, paper towels, coffee filters

Floral arrangements and houseplant trimmings



Prohibited Materials:

- No meat, dairy or bones
- No liquid waste, oil or grease
- No dimensional lumber or plywood
- No waxed paper products or wooden crates
- No cutlery, dishware, ceramics or glass
- No "compostable" plastics
- No take-out containers
- No cardboard

Keep Your Seeds Cool and Collected

Now that the planting furor of spring has subsided, what is the best way to manage those half-used seed packets?

As you may guess, tossing them in a bag with your gardening tools and twine can subject them to residual moisture and dirt which can result in a shorter shelf life for these little treasures.



It makes sense to save the seeds you will be planting again next year, or replanting in the fall. Prices of seeds have risen significantly in the past few years, and there is no reason not to save your seed. Even if you decide you don't care for a particular variety, someone else will surely appreciate the gift.

To help assure they remain viable, store seeds in a cool and dry environment. If your original seed packets are still in good shape, fold the top over and store in a zip lock bag with it's siblings. If the package is too torn up or damp to use, place the seeds in their own zip lock bag and label carefully. Consider a mailing label with the details placed *inside* the clear bag.

Gather up all your packets and place them inside a larger zip lock bag or a coffee can and store in the fridge until you are ready to use them.

Landfill and Compost Facility Update

As reported in our last newsletter, the County of Sonoma was exploring a possible sale of the Sonoma County Disposal Site. Sonoma Compost Company was unsure of how this possible change might affect our operation.

The result has been that the County has not sold the landfill, but instead has elected to contract with Republic Services to operate the facility in the short-term and to explore the possible long-term reopening of the site.

Sonoma Compost is continuing to operate at the same location for the time being, but we are looking at possible off and on-site locations as our present operation is sitting on top of an area designated for future disposal. A new site would also provide the additional capacity needed to meet present and future expansion needs of the program.

We appreciate the support we have received from the community as the County and City's have explored the best long-term disposal, composting and recycling options for Sonoma County residents and businesses.

If you would like to be included in periodic email updates about the status of any upcoming changes, please send us an email at office@sonomacompost.com and we'll keep you posted.

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