

# A COMMUNITY GUIDE TO COMPOSTING LEAVES AND YARD TRIMMINGS IN MAINE

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BoothBay Regional Refuse Disposal District

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# I. Introduction

Maine communities, large or small, urban, suburban, or rural, may wish to take a look at composting leaf and yard trimmings as a waste-to-resource management tool, either as an alternative to their current system, or as a new service to their residents and businesses.

Composting replicates and accelerates the natural process by which organic materials, such as leaves and yard trimmings, are converted into a nutrient rich, humus-like product for distribution as a soil amendment.

## A. Why do it ?

### 1. Lower Costs

Composting is a relatively inexpensive method for managing leaf and yard trimmings as compared to the cost of disposing the same materials at either landfills or incinerators. In addition, managing yard waste locally benefits us all by extending the limited life of in-state landfills, and by making the best use of expensive in -state incinerator capacity and technology.

### 2. Environmental Benefits

Diverting leaves and yard trimmings to local composting sites reduces the potential for water and air pollution from landfills, and reduces air emissions, residue, and incinerator ash that must be landfilled as a special waste. The use of compost can improve soil quality, reduce water consumption in the landscape, and reduce non-point source pollution from the overuse of chemical fertilizers. In addition, due to public health concerns, most communities have placed bans or strict controls over the open burning of leaves and yard trimmings.

### 3. Improve recycling rates and help meet reasonable progress goals

Municipal compost programs are credited three ways under Maine's current recycling reporting requirements: by the creation of the program, by the tons composted, and by instituting a ban on the disposal of leaves and yard trimmings. Nationwide, yard trimmings account for some 28 million tons or 13.4% of the MSW stream.

An average cubic yard of uncompacted leaves weighs between 200 and 250 pounds, a cubic yard of grass clippings, 350-450 lbs. While generation rates may vary widely from town to town, these figures show the potential impact of a compost program on disposal tonnage.

Many Maine towns that instituted bans on leaf and yard trimmings from MSW disposal have put a municipal compost program in place as a reasonable alternative.

#### 4. Improve public relations and education

Informing and educating citizens of their opportunity to participate in a municipal compost program increases their overall waste awareness and potential participation in other recycling efforts.

A properly managed and promoted community compost program is a readily accessible demonstration of "waste to resources" that positively engages the residents and businesses with tangible benefits back to the community. Do not underestimate the public relations value of free compost.

#### 5. Make a useful and desirable commodity

Composting turns waste materials into a valuable end product. Citizens, local businesses and public works departments can be both the suppliers of the feed stock and the end users of the compost.

## B. Why now?

### 1. Composting has proven a track record throughout the State

While there is ongoing research to improve methods of composting and to expand the uses of compost, composting has been part of the Maine waste management scene for more than a decade. Composting has been promoted through a variety of grant programs that funded master composting training, home composting education and equipment, pilot and demonstration projects and community level leaf and yard trimming composting operations.

### 2. Composting has encouraging standing in regulation

In November of 1998, The Maine Department of Environmental Protection published the new Solid Waste Management Rules and Regulations. These provide a clear and consistent framework for environmentally sound compost operations. The application process for a permit by rule for composting leaf and yard trimmings has been simplified and streamlined.

### 3. Ready access to good technical assistance

In addition to knowledgeable staff at the Maine D.E.P and State Planning Office, Maine is home to two nationally known resources on composting: the **Compost Team** and the **Compost School**. Both programs are cooperative efforts by the Departments of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, the Maine State Planning Office, the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Maine, and the University of Maine at Orono.