



## How to Begin a Commercial Composting Program for Organics/Food Waste Recycling at School



Collaboratively Prepared by Seattle Public School District and Cedar Grove Composting

Seattle Public School District has started an off-site commercial composting program for interested schools that meet Cedar Grove Composting and School District criteria. This program helps schools collect lunchroom food waste and have it containerized, hauled away and recycled by Cedar Grove Composting.



**Cedar Grove Organic Material Dumpster**

Lawton Elementary School was the first school in Seattle to successfully pilot this program in 2005. Thanks to their hard work and determination, Lawton's program is now used as a model for other schools to implement their own food waste recycling programs. [Viewing a video of composting at Lawton is mandatory for the Composting Team to effectively plan their composting program.](#)



**SPS students sort food waste and recycling.**

Photo courtesy of Soren Burns.



## **Why** *recycle your organics through Cedar Grove Services?*

- **Recycling is better for the environment than landfills.** Help protect natural resources by recycling your organic waste to make quality compost soil, which will help retain moisture for plants and reduce the need for harmful fertilizers!
  - **Student-run program promotes learning.** Students manage the day-to-day operations for the lunchroom compost program and are responsible for a variety of tasks. This service-based learning develops their leadership and team building skills.
  - **Recycling saves money.** Similar to mixed recycling for products, organic waste recycling generally costs half of what we would pay for garbage disposal. This is significant when you consider that the Seattle Public School District spends well over \$1,000,000 a year on refuse disposal. We will help you evaluate costs to obtain the most savings.
- 

## **How** *do we start our own commercial compost program?*

### **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- **Composting Team / Team Leader / Teacher(s)**
  - ✓ Sign & return attached checklist to Seattle School District Resource Conservation Specialist (for Seattle Public Schools) when initiating the intent to begin food waste collection/recycling program.
  - ✓ Be prepared to include organics/ compost lesson plans in classroom learning activities.
  - ✓ Plan and allow time for Cedar Grove Composting Educational Coordinator or Representative to train lead class and discuss how to train school.
  - ✓ Allow recess, lunch, or class time for students to monitor lunchroom waste disposal.
  - ✓ Provide oversight and coordination of the program and participating students.
  - ✓ Ensure that all items on the checklist have been completed in the order listed.
  - ✓ Involve custodians and food service staff in all program planning, dumpster sizing and placement. (see "Custodians and Food Service Staff" below)
  - ✓ Provide progress reports, issues, communications to School district, Cedar Grove Representative, and other key team members as needed.
  - ✓ Budget and secure enough funding to sustain the program for at least one year. SPS Resource Conservation Specialist will help you determine an appropriate budget.
- **Lead Classrooms / Lunchroom Monitors / Students**
  - ✓ This program is most successful when it is predominantly student-run.
  - ✓ Typically the older classes of students take on the leadership, training and monitoring of the program, i.e. 5<sup>th</sup> graders in an elementary school. We recommend having two "lead classes" in consecutive grades to help annual transitions run smoothly. Students in these classes are Lunchroom Monitors on a regular basis
  - ✓ Student Lunchroom Monitors typically train the rest of the school to sort their food waste prior to lunchtime sorting, either through an assembly or peer-to-peer classroom training.

- ✓ Lunchroom monitors assist with lunchtime waste disposal and teach other students which waste material is disposed of as garbage or mixed recycling or composting.
  - ✓ Students will take the food waste from the lunchroom to the outdoor dumpster, and are responsible for locking the dumpster when not in use, re-lining the indoor containers with biodegradable bags, and maintaining clean indoor containers.
  
  - **Custodial and Nutrition Services Staff**
    - ✓ Be involved in planning and decision making process for dumpster and logistics.
    - ✓ Composting program should NOT include additional duties or daily involvement of custodians and food service staff. Any assistance from custodians and food service staff should be voluntary.
    - ✓ Gloves, biodegradable bags, and other program materials must be purchased solely for the program. Custodial/food service supplies must not be used for the composting program.
  
  - **Cedar Grove Composting Education Coordinator**
    - ✓ Provide initial program description, training, site analysis, and signage.
    - ✓ Attend planning meetings, student and staff training sessions, follow-up observations.
    - ✓ Verify dumpster size and placement with Cedar Grove operations expert and communicate estimated container delivery.
  
  - **SPS Resource Conservation Specialist (for Seattle Public Schools)**
    - ✓ SPS Resource Conservation Specialist provides initial program introduction, attends meetings, trainings, answers questions, and promotes recycling in conjunction with composting; orders and changes dumpsters for garbage, mixed recycling and composting.
    - ✓ Consult on program decisions and direction. Will consult with the Cedar Grove Representative at key stages throughout the program implementation.
    - ✓ Orders and schedules container delivery with Cedar Grove Compost
    - ✓ When the Resource Conservation Specialist orders the compost dumpster- it is considered the “go ahead” for the compost program.
- 

## Other helpful information:

**Indoor Compost Containers:** Seattle School District uses **RED** indoor compost containers/ barrels (yes, they must be red). The 32 gallon container is the preferred consistent selection. Use of a lid is not necessary. Use of a dolly or attached wheels is strongly recommended. Compost containers for indoor use must be ordered and paid for by each school. Blue mixed recycle containers are usually provided by the school district. For suppliers, please contact SPS Resource Conservation Specialist.

**Compost Dumpster Sizing:** The appropriate size of the food waste dumpster will be decided at the end of the Practice Week (see below) by consulting with Cedar Grove, SPS Resource Conservation Specialist, and the school. Factors that will be considered are: number of students, type of lunch

program, current mixed recycling and garbage sizes and frequency of pick-ups, location of dumpster, and access.

**Compost Dumpster Costs/Funding:** The rental and weekly pick-up service is usually the individual school's responsibility, and must be paid for with an Open Purchase Order (see below) or credit card. The goal of the program is that once established, composting will be cost neutral through reducing the garbage dumpster size, number of pick-ups and related costs. Actual compost dumpster cost cannot be determined until a dumpster size has been chosen. Contact SPS Resource Conservation Specialist for a list of current rates and sizes, and see Example Budget for Elementary School below.

**The Seattle Public School District agrees to pay for the rental and pick-up fees for the compost dumpster once the school has reduced the size of their garbage container, provided that the reduction in garbage cost is greater than or equal to the cost of the compost dumpster. SPS Resource Conservation Specialist will help you evaluate current costs and garbage reduction goals.**

Schools are encouraged to explore creative methods and fund raising efforts in order to cover the cost of the program. For example, you could purchase Cedar Grove compost in bulk and ask your local grocery store to donate bread bags. Students then fill the bread bags with compost and insert a paper label saying "This Cedar Grove compost is made from school lunchroom, local restaurant, and home food waste! Your purchase will help us start our own food waste recycling program." Then sell the bags at a fundraiser or community event. (For more information about composting at an event at Seattle Public Schools, contact a SPS Resource Conservation Specialist.)

**Open Purchase Orders:** Schools are encouraged to use an Open Purchase Order to pay for the cost of the Cedar Grove dumpster and purchase biodegradable bags from Cedar Grove. Many school secretaries are familiar with this simple process, which allows schools to set aside a predetermined amount of money for their commercial compost program. Contact SPS Resource Conservation Specialist for more information and see the Example Budget for an Elementary School below.

**Biodegradable Bags:** Liner bags for the red indoor containers must be purchased by the school for the first year of the program. The bags used must be Cedar Grove tested and approved (a list of approved bags is posted on the web site: cgcompost.com). The school may decide where and how to purchase these bags. Cedar Grove sells a wide variety of biodegradable bags, which can be purchased with an Open Purchase Order or credit card. Contact SPS Resource Conservation Specialist for a list of current costs, sizes, and more information about biodegradable bags purchased by the SPS District. Also see Example Budget for Elementary School below.

**The Seattle Public School District agrees to pay for a limited number of biodegradable bags for SPS schools that have been operating a successful commercial composting program for at least one full school year and plan on continuing the program for another year.** (Ex: School finishes their Practice Week and their Cedar Grove dumpster is delivered March 1<sup>st</sup>. SPS would purchase biodegradable bags for the school starting March 1<sup>st</sup> of the following year.)

**Gloves:** Due to the "ick factor" associated with sorting food waste, all students monitoring the lunchroom composting program should wear gloves. These are the responsibility of the school and should be purchased specifically for this program. Custodial and food service gloves must not be used. The school may choose to use single-use disposable gloves or reusable gloves.

We recommend that single-use gloves be polyethylene, like those used at sandwich shops, instead of latex which many people are allergic to and are typically more costly. Reusable gloves must be washed with soap and warm water after each use.

**Parental Permission:** Please be aware that not all students and parents appreciate the idea of composting and sorting through garbage. It is advisable to provide the monitoring students with gloves and acquire parental permission if appropriate.

**Practice Week:** Before a Cedar Grove dumpster can be delivered, the school must collect lunchroom compost using fully implemented procedures for one week, disposing it as garbage. This Practice Week helps ensure that the program is up and running with minimal contamination before the compost is sent to Cedar Grove. Cedar Grove and/or SPS Resource Conservation Specialist will observe the compost collection process at the end of the Practice Week before a composting dumpster is ordered. School students and staff are encouraged to ask questions that have arisen during the week. (Also see "District Facilitation")

**Signage & Promotion:** Cedar Grove will provide basic food waste sorting signage and stickers for the red indoor containers. SPS Resource Conservation Specialist will provide standard mixed recycling signage. Schools are encouraged to develop student-created signage to reinforce their food waste sorting training and facilitate peer-to-peer learning.

We have found that color-coded posters with actual items attached are very effective. Typically they consist of 3 different pieces of color paper: grey for garbage, blue for recycling, and red for compost. Common materials are attached to each piece of paper accordingly. For example, a plastic fork, plastic straw wrapper, and hot food "boat" are taped to the grey paper. Clean paper, milk cartons, and yogurt tubs are taped to the blue paper. Paper napkins, paper trays, and pictures of food are taped to the red paper.

**Compost Project Agreement:** The agreement below must be signed and received by SPS Resource Conservation Specialist before a Seattle Public School may begin a commercial compost program.

---

## Example Budget for Elementary School – 1<sup>st</sup> Year

*Estimated costs below are accurate as of July 2009. For current costs, contact SPS Resource Conservation Specialist.*

Red indoor **containers** with wheels (one-time cost, 2 @ \$90 each) = \$180

Cedar Grove compost **dumpster** (1 yd<sup>3</sup> size picked up once per week for 10 months @ \$80/mo) = \$800\*

Dumpster delivery fee (one-time cost) = \$20

Biodegradable **bags** (33-gallon size, 4 bags/day for 180 days @ \$0.55 each) = \$396\*

Bag delivery fee (per shipment) = \$15

Disposable poly **gloves** (4 pairs/day for 180 days @ \$0.03 per pair) = \$21.60

**Grand Total = \$1,432.60**

\*Seattle Public School District agrees to pay for dumpster cost if/when garbage costs are reduced (see Compost Dumpster Costs/Funding above) and limited number of biodegradable bags after one year (see Biodegradable Bags above).



# SPS Compost Program Timeline

## Sample

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Read the "How to Begin a School Composting Program" document. View Lawton composting video.*	✔					
Talk with school Principal, teachers, and parents. Put together a Composting Team with at least one teacher willing to coordinate the program.	✔					
Talk with the school Custodial and Nutrition Services staff about the program. Invite them to future meeting with SPS Resource Conservation Specialist. <i>(note: this program should not add any additional work for them. Their level of participation is entirely voluntary.)</i>	✔					
Identify 2 Lead Classrooms in consecutive grades (3rd grade or older) to be the core group of Lunchroom Monitors.	✔					
Contact SPS Resource Conservation Specialist (who will notify Cedar Grove Education Coordinator). Schedule an initial meeting with the Composting Team and Resource Conservation Specialist to discuss feasibility and logistics.		✔				
Develop a Composting Program budget and secure enough funding to continue the program for at least one year. Complete Open Purchase Order. *		✔				
Purchase red lunchroom containers, gloves for Monitors, and biodegradable bags. *		✔				
Determine how the Lead Classrooms will train the rest of the school to sort their food waste. (Peer-to-peer classroom training? Assembly? Something else?). Create training schedule.		✔				
Create Lunchroom Monitor schedule with one student from the upper grade Lead Classroom and one student from the lower grade Lead Classroom. The older student will be the lead Monitor. Monitors may need to miss part of recess, lunch, or other scheduled time. Each pair of monitors will be responsible for one waste station with 3 containers (garbage, recycling, and food waste).			✔			
Notify parents/guardians of upcoming Compost Program. Allow them to opt-out for their student, especially if they are in one of the Lead Classrooms. Everyone is not necessarily comfortable with their student sorting food waste.			✔			
Schedule training for Lead Classrooms with Cedar Grove Education Coordinator and SPS Resource Conservation Specialist. *			✔			
Lead Classrooms Train the rest of the school. Schedule follow-up visit with SPS Resource Conservation Specialist.			✔			
Set up lunchroom waste stations to include red compost container(s). Consult with Custodial and Nutrition Services staff for best placement. *				✔		
Begin school-wide Practice Week! Give Open Purchase Order number to SPS Resource Conservation Specialist.				✔		
Follow-up visit by SPS Resource Conservation Specialist. Resource Conservation Specialist determine compost dumpster size and either request that Cedar Grove deliver a compost dumpster or recommend that school continue with practice (depending on food waste sorting).					✔	
Congratulations! You now have a commercial lunchroom compost program!						

\* Indicates a task that the SPS Resource Conservation Specialist assists with.



## Seattle Public Schools Compost Program Checklist

- ❑ View Lawton composting video (available from SPS Resource Conservation Specialist).
- ❑ Establish Composting Team and identify Lead Teacher(s) and Lead Classrooms. Involve Custodial and Nutrition Services staff in discussion (this program should not add additional work for them).
- ❑ Contact SPS Resource Conservation Specialist for an initial visit *before* completing the following items.
- ❑ Develop Compost Program budget, identify funding, and purchase materials (indoor containers, biodegradable bags, gloves, etc).
- ❑ Create school training schedule for Lead Classrooms and develop Lunchroom Monitor schedule. Notify parents and school community of upcoming Compost Program.
- ❑ Schedule training for Lead Classrooms and Lunchroom Monitors by Cedar Grove Composting Education Coordinator and SPS Resource Conservation Specialist.
- ❑ Lead Classrooms train the rest of the school. Schedule follow-up visit with SPS Resource Conservation Specialist for the end of the Practice Week. Set up lunchroom waste stations to include compost and mixed recycling.
- ❑ Practice Week! Entire school practices lunchroom food waste sorting for Compost Program for at least 1 week.
- ❑ Follow-up visit by SPS Resource Conservation Specialist and Cedar Grove representative to set up dumpster delivery day and pick up schedule.
- ❑ Compost dumpster delivered! Congratulations!

---

## Contacts

**SPS Resource Conservation Specialist**

Nicole Riss

206-252-0599 or [nariss@seattleschools.org](mailto:nariss@seattleschools.org)

**Cedar Grove Organics**

877-994-4466 or

[schools@gogreenscene.com](mailto:schools@gogreenscene.com)

-----  
*Detach and send completed form to SPS Resource Conservation Specialist, MS 23-365 or fax to 206-252-0646*

# Seattle Public Schools Compost Project Agreement

I/we at \_\_\_\_\_ School are committed to running a Composting Program at our school. This program is intended for off-site recycling of food waste and organic materials.

The school is prepared to fund or find funding for this program. It is the goal of this program that, once well established, costs to the school will be minimal. The Seattle Public School District agrees to pay for the cost of the compost dumpster if/when garbage costs are sufficiently reduced. The Seattle Public School District agrees to supply a limited number of biodegradable bags after the school has operated a successful program for at least one year. I/we understand this will be an on-going and potentially long-term effort.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher Name(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher Signature(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Signature

