



DEPARTMENT OF
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Home Composting Survey Report - 2012

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Home Composting Survey Report - 2012

by

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Home Composting Survey Report - 2012

The need for home composting in Washington State still exists. In 2010 residents and businesses disposed of 4,548,275 tons of municipal solid waste in landfills. Organic materials, including yard debris, food waste, and woody debris made up 55% of this material. This included over 8,822 tons of wood waste. This figure doesn't include the amount of material burned in back yards. It's safe to conclude that if someone can burn in their back yard, surely they could compost! Back yard composting also fills a niche since many locations in the state still lack curbside yardwaste collection service.

In 2005, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) hired Ridolfi Inc. to collect information on statewide home composting levels. During April of 2012, Ecology created and conducted a similar yet condensed version of the survey. The goal was to see how statewide home composting levels have changed since 2005 and also obtain new information. This survey once again included questions about barriers and asked for suggestions on how the Waste 2 Resources Program can help develop and/or improve home composting programs. The survey questions can be viewed in Attachment A at the end of this report.

Survey Methodology

The 2012 survey was distributed electronically using an online survey to 39 county public works/solid waste specialists, one representative/survey per county. This survey included 13 questions. A follow-up email was sent to non-respondents. There were 23 counties and three cities that completed the survey. However, the three cities (Port Angeles, Spokane, Walla Walla) were designated to provide countywide information. Therefore, for the purpose of this survey, the 26 responders will be referred to as counties.

Summary

Since the first survey in 2005, survey results showed a decrease in home composting activities statewide. Among the 26 respondents, 77% of the counties have an active home composting program, while in 2005, 88% of counties (and one city) had one. Most of these programs were available statewide.

Although home composting activity levels appear to have decreased, the counties that responded varied from the original survey. There were eight fewer counties that responded to this survey as compared to 2005. Also the previous study included responses from one city (Seattle) and six non-profits. The format of the survey also changed. We intentionally developed a shorter survey of 13 questions (compared to 28 in 2005). All but one question (grasscycling) was focused on home composting. This led to some challenges in comparing the two sets of data.

Since most of the questions were similar but different, we are only able to make some general comparisons.

There was an increase in the promotion of home composting at compost workshops by 12%, events by 18%, and demonstration sites by 19%. The most significant change was a 23% decrease at bin distribution sites. Sixty-two percent of the respondents also promoted home composting through websites, and 34% used social media. Only one respondent is just now planning to start a home composting program.

There was an 11% decrease in county staff that implements compost education and outreach activities (72% compared to 62%). The recommendation to include grass clippings and soiled paper in home composting systems saw an increase. We added a question regarding whether leaving grass clippings on lawns was promoted, and 89% answered yes. Over half of the responders (54%) also found barriers to starting or expanding home composting programs. Barriers included: lack of funding/staff, and/or time; low population density; and low public participation rate. The lack of information as a barrier dropped from 13% in the previous survey to almost zero! The barrier of low population density increased (20% to 26%).

Respondents provided some valuable suggestions on how the Waste 2 Resources Program can help improve home composting programs. See #13 below for details. To help start or expand home composting programs within Washington State, Ecology's Waste 2 Resources Program should consider the following suggestions: Provide funding sources for home composting education in local communities; work with the county master gardeners program to provide community outreach activities; develop educational brochures/webinars; and send organic specialists to local communities to provide educational courses on composting upon request.

The highlights of the home composting survey responses by county are presented as a table in Attachment B at the end of this report.

Survey Responses

Following are summaries of the responses to the 13 survey questions:

(1) Question 1: Does your county have an active home compost educational program?

A total of 26 respondents responded to this question. Among these responses:

- Twenty (76.9%) indicated that they have an active home compost education program.
- Three (11.5%) indicated that they do not have such an educational program.
- Two (7.7%) indicated that they have an active educational program, but it is not countrywide.
- One (3.9%) indicated that it has an educational program, but not active currently.

(2) Question 2: Where do you (or others) promote home composting?

A total of 26 respondents responded to this question. Among these responses:

- Twenty (76.9%) indicated that they promote composting via educational programs such as county fairs.
- Eighteen (69.2%) indicated that they do that via demonstration sites.
- Seventeen (65.4%) indicated that they have compost workshops as an educational activity;
- Sixteen (61.5%) indicate that they post educational materials on websites;
- Nine (34.6%) indicated that social media (e.g., blog) is used as a tool of spreading educational materials;
- Seven (26.9%) indicated that they promote home composting via compost bin distribution;
- Seven (26.9%) indicated that they use other educational activities to promote home composting.

(3) Question 3: Who implements your compost education and outreach activities?

A total of 26 responded to this question. Among them:

- Sixteen (61.5%) indicated that the public works staff implement compost education and outreach activities.
- Fifteen (57.7%) indicated that master gardeners and master composters implement such activities;
- Nine (34.6%) indicated that county WSU Extension staff implement such activities.
- Four (15.4%) indicated that city staff implement such activities.
- Three (11.5%) indicated that non-WSU Extension staff, or volunteers implement education and outreach activities.

(4) List the funding sources for your home composting program. (skip if not applicable):

A total of 26 responded to this question. The common funding sources listed by respondents include:

- Ecology's Coordinated Prevention Grant (CPG).
- Local solid waste funding, yard debris tipping fees.
- Transfer station revenue, solid waste fund, solid waste excise taxes.
- WSU Extension.
- Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

(5) Which home composting system(s) are promoted in your city and/or county? (check all that apply)

A total of 26 responded to this question. Among them,

- Twenty four (92.3%) indicated that compost bins are promoted in their cities/or counties.

- Nineteen (73.1%) indicated that worm bins are promoted.
- Eighteen (69.2%) indicated that compost piles are promoted.
- Six (23.1%) indicated that other compost systems are also be promoted.

(6) Which materials below do you (or others) recommend adding to home composting systems? (check all that apply)

A total of 26 responded to this question. All the organic materials listed in the survey are recommended to be composted by one or more respondents. Among them:

- Grass clippings are recommended by 24 respondents (92.3%).
- Yard waste with 23 (88.5%) respondents.
- Paper products, uncoated (napkins, towels, etc) with 18 (69.2%) respondents.
- Food waste (fruit and vegetable only) with 16 (61.5%) respondents.
- Food waste (almost all except meat, dairy, and oil) with 13 (50%) respondents.
- Other materials with 2 (7.7%) respondents.
- Food waste (no restriction) being the least recommended with only 1 (3.8%) respondent.

(7) Do you (or others) promote leaving grass clippings on lawns?

A total of 26 responded to this question. Among them:

- Twenty-three (88.5%) promote leaving grass clippings on lawns,
- Three (11.5 %) do not promote leaving grass clippings on lawns

(8) If you have a home composting program, please describe any significant changes being planned (skip if not applicable).

Among 16 respondents to this question, only one county indicated that the program will make changes in its current home composting program. Changes may include:

- Give away bins
- Restart a brush chipping program
- Attain a 50% food waste diversion rate by 2023 through decentralized vermin-composting

Expand the compost demonstration site

(9) If you don't have a home composting program, do you (or others) plan on starting one

Among 16 respondents to this question,

- Only 1 (6.3%) indicated that the county does not have a home composting program,
- Only one indicated the county does not plan on starting one.

(10) Do you have any barrier(s) to starting or expanding a home composting program?

Among 26 respondents, a little over a half (53.8%) indicated that they have barrier(s) to starting or expanding a home composting program, with (46.2%) indicating that they do not.

(11) If you (or others) have barriers to starting or expanding a home composting program, what are they? (check all that apply)

Among the 23 respondents indicating they have barriers to starting or expanding a home compost program, the barriers included:

- Lack of funding, staff, and/or time is the biggest barrier (12 respondents, 52.2%)
- Low population density (6 respondents, 26.1%)
- Low public participation rate (3 respondents, 13%)
- Relying on other organic material management options (3 respondents, 13%)
- Policy issues (2 respondents, 8.7%)
- Lack of ability to make changes (1 respondent, 4.3%)

It should be noted that three respondents (13%) indicated that other barriers also contribute to starting or expanding a home composting program, and eight (34.8%) respondents indicated that this question is not applicable to their home composting program. No respondents indicated a lack of current home composting information was a barrier to stating or expanding a home composting program. One indicated a desire to learn more about composting.

(12) Do you have suggestions on how Ecology can help start or expand home composting within your communities?

Suggestions include:

- As with all programs, they can easily be expanded with more staff/supplies.
- Send money.
- Promote composting by educating the lawn & garden/hardware store employees who could talk to their customers.
- I would like to see better outreach also for less densely populated areas in rural communities. As the sole educator for the County it is difficult to go far east to educate populations in those areas of the County. Mobilizing volunteers may be helpful in this.
- I would love to get one started in Garfield County! I wish I were more knowledgeable about composting. Are there webinars/online resources for this?
- Create a 'template' informational brochure that jurisdictions can customize. Have a 'compost expert' available to lead trainings or attend workshops.
- Coordinate quarterly meetings for MRC volunteers of different regions of state so they can get together and brainstorm ideas on making their programs more successful, etc.
- Form partnerships with local farms to provide demonstration sites. Could be a three way partnership with County staff identifying/recruiting good partners. County staff would provide advice/planning and conduct a quarterly "audit" of the partner farm which would serve as a grant claim submitted to Ecology and payable to the farmer.

(13) Other comments

- Outreach to rural communities is difficult.

- King County has scaled back its program and would not consider it active. We no longer emphasize home composting. We have info on our web site, provide limited training to MRC's and respond to public requests when asked. However the program is no longer implementing bin distribution, or worm bin construction as we have in the past.
- WSU Extension/Master Gardeners lack funding. Solid Waste Transfer Stations lack funding for personnel, equipment, space at small stations, etc. It would be difficult to start another program in these hard economic times.
- We are participating with DNR in their giving a free compost bin when they turn in a burn barrel. (Wild Fire Prevention Program)
- The biggest barrier to home composting is the lack of high carbon materials like wood chips in a form suitable for composting along with the "green" wastes.
- We have adequate funding, but not enough staff time to fully coordinate. This is a rural county and backyard composting education is 1/10 of duties (after recycling, haz waste, reuse, etc).
- We use County Staff for compost education. We try to have a master gardener or composter at the event but this is not always possible.
- We used to get periodic emails from Ecology staff on organics topics of interest and updates. That has fallen off over the past several years.
- We've had challenges getting enough people to sign up for this year's MRC training class. Only two people in West End and two people in East End. We need to find ways to get people to sign up to get trained. We have a great group of volunteers but they are very busy and need help!
- I think it would be productive to offer a community organizing class for volunteers through Ecology once or twice a year for a full or half day. I find this could be helpful to my volunteers, and could even be in a webinar format so people don't have to travel. Just an idea.
- Thanks for getting the MTCA account back in order. Please consider streamlining grant claim requirements to lower admin. costs and put more value into service delivery. Keep up the good work!

Recommendations

Based on the responses and suggestions/comments, the Waste 2 Resources Program could do the following to help counties start or expand home composting programs statewide:

- Provide resources/tools to counties by directing them to existing sources such as the W2R Program's Organics Materials Management website and the WSU Compost Educator's Guide.
- Provide technical assistance to local governments for home composting training or workshops.
- Notify them if funding opportunities for home composting programs become available.

Appendices

Appendix A. Washington State Department of Ecology
Home Composting Survey

Appendix B. Highlights of the Home Composting Survey
Responses

Appendix A. Washington State Department of Ecology Home Composting Survey

Dear County Solid Waste/Public Works Specialist,

Department of Ecology's Waste 2 Resources Program is conducting a survey to gauge current home composting levels throughout the state. Ecology collected similar information in 2005 for the [Home Composting Survey Report](#). The new survey results will help Ecology to direct resources (grants, technical assistance, etc.) that support new and existing home composting programs.

Please complete the survey at: <http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/856938/Home-Composting-Survey> by **April 13, 2012**. Make sure to base your answers on the communities that you serve.

If you have any questions, contact Canming Xiao at cxia461@ecy.wa.gov or (509) 575-2842. Thank you for completing this survey. We appreciate your input.

1. Please list your contact information:

Name:

Department:

Email:

Phone:

2. Does your county have an active home compost educational program?

Yes

No

3. Where do you (or others) promote home composting? (check all that apply)

Compost workshops. List how many workshops per year: _____

Other events (fairs, classes, etc.)

Demonstration sites

Bin distribution

Website. List site: _____

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs etc.)

Other (specify): _____

4. Who implements your compost activities? (check all that apply)

WSU Extension staff

Master Gardeners

Master Composter

Recycler Volunteers

City staff

County staff

Other (specify): _____

5. List the funding sources for your home compost program:

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

6. Which of the materials below do you (or others) recommend adding to home composting systems? (check all that apply)

- Grass clippings
- Other yard waste
- Food waste – only fruit and vegetable
- Food waste – most is ok, except meat, dairy, oil
- Food waste – no restrictions
- Paper products, uncoated (napkins, towels etc.)

7. Do you (or others) in your county promote leaving grass clippings on lawns?

- Yes
- No

8. Which home composting system is promoted in your city/county? (check all that apply)

- Compost bin
- Compost pile
- Worm bin
- Other (specify) _____
- None

9. If you have a home composting program, are you planning any significant changes?

- Yes (specify) _____
- No

10. If you don't have a home composting program, do you plan on starting one?

- Yes
- No

Do you have any barrier(s) starting or expanding your home composting program?

- Yes
- No (go to #13)

11. What are the barriers to starting or expanding your home composting program?

- Lack of funding, staff, and/or time
- Low public participation rate
- Low population density
- Climate issues make it difficult to make compost
- Lack of current home composting information
- Policy issues

Rely on other organic material management options

Lack of ability to make changes (another organization runs compost program)

Other (specify): _____

12. Do you have suggestions on how Ecology can help start or expand home composting within these communities?

13. Comments?

Appendix B. Highlights of the Home Composting Survey Responses

County	Have a Home Composting Program	Home Composting Issues	Upcoming Changes	Respondent Recommendations
Adams	No response			
Asotin	No response			
Benton	No response			
Chelan	No	None	None	Ecology needs to spend more resources on bigger ticket items that affect the environment, like toxic or hazardous waste
Clallam*	Yes	Lack of staff, and/or time	N/A	More staff/time
Clark	Yes	None	None	None
Columbia	No response			
Cowlitz	Yes	None	None	None
Douglas	No	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time	None	None
Ferry	Yes	None	None	None
Franklin	Yes	None	None	None
Garfield	No	None	Plan to have one	Webinars/online sources for this
Grant	Yes	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time Low population density	None	None
Grays Harbor	Yes	None	None	None
Island	No response			
Jefferson	Temporarily not active	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time	Attain a 50% food waste diversion rate by 2023 with a decentralized vermicomposting program	Form partnerships with local farms to provide demonstration sites
King	Yes	None	N/A	None

County	Have a Home Composting Program	Home Composting Issues	Upcoming Changes	Respondent Recommendations
Kitsap	Yes	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time, policy issues, rely on other organic material management options	N/A	None
Kittitas	Yes	None	None	None
Klickitat	Yes	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time The biggest barrier to home composting is the lack of high carbon materials like wood chips in a form suitable for composting along with the "green" wastes	May restart brush chipping program	Funding
Lewis	Yes	Low public participation rate/low population density	Grow program in east of the county	Coordinate quarterly meetings for MRC volunteers of different regions of state so they can get together and brainstorm ideas on making their programs more successful
Lincoln	Yes	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time Low population density	None	None
Mason	No response			
Okanogan	No response			
Pacific	Yes, but not countywide	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time	None	None
Pend Oreille	Yes, but not countywide	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time Low population density Climate issues (humidity levels etc.) make it difficult to make compost	N/A	Promote composting by educating the lawn/hardware store employees who could talk to their customers

County	Have a Home Composting Program	Home Composting Issues	Upcoming Changes	Respondent Recommendations
Pierce	Yes	None	None	None
Port of Angles	Yes	Lack of staff, and/or time	N/A	More staff/time
San Juan	No response			
Skagit	Yes	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time Low population density, policy issues, lack of ability to make change	Compost bin given away	Would be productive to offer a community organizing class for volunteers through Ecology once or twice a year for a full or half day. Would be helpful to volunteers, and could even be in a webinar format
Skamania	No response			
Snohomish	No response			
Spokane**	Yes	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time, low participation rate	None	More staff/supplies
Stevens	No response			
Thurston	Yes	None	N/A	Periodic emails from Ecology on organic topics
Wahkiakum	No response			
Walla Walla***	Yes	Lack of funding, staff, and/or time	None	Brochure, or compost experts available to lead trainings
Whatcom	Yes	Low public participation rate	None	None
Whitman	No response			
Yakima	No response			

* Response by City of Port Angeles for Clallam County

** Response by Spokane Regional Solid Waste Division for Spokane County

*** Response by the City of Walla Walla for Walla Walla County