Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders: A Community Composter Training Program

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Composting for Community Project
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Why does training matter?

• What could possibly go wrong?
  – Rats?
  – Smells?
  – Upset neighbors?
  – Overworked volunteers?
  – Making people sick???

• Possible training goals:
  – Empower/train volunteers to educate their communities
  – Reduce pressure on/divert from landfills
  – Create a valuable resource
  – Improve environmental services (soil, water, air)
  – Teach the science of good compost
  – Provide mentorship and hands-on opportunities
Composting for Community Project Goals

- Identify existing composter training programs, specifically models
- Facilitate information sharing among them
- Launch a model Master Composter training program in the DC-metro region in partnership with ECO City Farms
- Produce a Master Composter Toolkit
- Replicate training program
What, exactly, is a Master Composter?

✓ Identify existing Master Composter programs
  – Connect with program administrators
  – Survey existing programs
  – Focus on model characteristics

✓ Facilitate information sharing among them
  – Create a national listserve (via Wiggio)
  – Collect resources
  – Create web resources *(coming soon...)*
Master Composter Program
National Survey

Purpose:

• Conduct first comprehensive survey of active programs from around the country
• Collect content and inspiration for Master Composter Toolkit
  – What makes a program a Master Composter program?
  – Lessons learned, common challenges, creative solutions, characteristics of successful programs
• Sketch out a diverse set of templates for replication
Master Composter Program
National Survey

Results:

• 24 of 54 programs responded
  – 16 states represented: CA, CT, GA, MI, MN, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OR, PA, RI, TX, VT, WA, WI

• Common themes
  – Purpose & vision
  – Long history & broad reach

• Common challenges & needs:
  – Limited staff, tight budgets & need for support
  – Access to training materials is a key need!
Master Composter Program National Survey

Are program participants required to do community service?

Yes: 96% (23)
No: 4% (1)

*24 total responses, 100% of submissions

Do program participants build or manage compost systems as part of the course?

Yes: 67% (16)
No: 33% (8)

*24 total responses, 100% of submissions

Type of volunteer activities completed by program participants:

- Building/installing compost systems: 65% (15)
- Establishing community composting programs: 70% (16)
- Providing technical assistance: 74% (17)
- Giving presentations: 100% (23)
- Tabling: 74% (17)
- Selling or distributing compost bins: 17% (4)
- Other, please list: 22% (5)

*23 total responses, 96% of submissions
Model Program Spotlight:
NYC Compost Project
Creating a Replicable Model: The Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders

✓ Launch a model Master Composter program in the MD-DC region in partnership with
  – Beginner
    • Full day, already being offered by ECO City Farms
  – Advanced
  – Master Apprenticeship
NSR Advanced Composter

**Course Content:**
- Composting 101
- The science of composting
- Compost testing
- Pile building
- Bin design & tool safety
- Vermicomposting
- Soil biology
- Community engagement

**Course Requirements:**
- Attend the course
- Complete 30 hours Community Composting Service
- Design a Capstone Project that serves your community
NSR Advanced Composter

Course Instruction:

• Roughly 40 hours:
  – 12 hours in the classroom
  – 12 hours working hand-on
  – 6 hours building composting bins
  – 8 hours touring composting sites

• Work with specialists:
  – Vermiculture: Rhonda Sherman of NCSU Extension
  – Bin Building: Eriks Brolis of Urban Farm Plans
  – Community Engagement: Nadine Bloch of Beautiful Trouble
  – Soil Science: local University Extension agents
Application Process:

- Competitive & selective application process based on:
  - community leadership,
  - ability to engage a diverse array of community members,
  - existing composting experience,
  - commitment to completing all course requirements,
  - and dedication to spreading the community composting gospel
“What does ‘compost’ mean to you?”
Monitoring O2
Lab Tests for Compost
2014 NSR Bin Build
NSR Advanced Composter

Capstone Projects

• 20 projects around the DC Metro
  – 6 in MD (in 4 counties)
  – 13 in DC (in 5 of 8 wards)
  – 1 in VA (Alexandria)

• Sites include:
  – Schools & Universities
  – Urban Gardens & Farms
  – Farmers Market
Community Partners & Collaborators

- Benny Erez, ECO City Farms
- Josh Singer, DPR

Other Collaborations:
DGS, WYG,
Compost Cab
NSR Master Composter Apprenticeship

- 8 NSR Advanced Composter course graduates
- Focused 8-week Intensive
  - 3-bin, urban
- Mini-workshops
  - Bokashi
  - Feedstock storage
  - Mixing trough
  - Compost sifter
  - Signage
  - Curing storage
NSR Training Program

• Materials created:
  – Draft Manual
  – Curriculum
  – Best Management Practices Guide
  – Data Collection Logs
  – Project Components & Site Flow Overviews

• In the works:
  – Instructional videos
  – Troubleshooting FAQ
  – 3-Bin User Checklist
Support Replication of Models

- Produce a Master Composter Toolkit
  - Web resources: videos, maps, social media, etc.
  - Open-source training materials
  - Sample budgets
- Replicate training program
  - Looking for partners!
Questions?

Interested in replicating the Neighborhood Soil Rebuilder program in your community? Let us know!

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Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders
Composter Training Program

COURSE OVERVIEW:
The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), in partnership with ECO City Farms, is offering training on how to compost in community-based settings. Our Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders composter training program is training community leaders in the practice and science of small-scale composting, empowering them to produce mature stable compost that will enhance local soil fertility and structure. Once trained, these community leaders install and operate small-scale sites, train other community leaders, share lessons learned, and spread enthusiasm for composting. Each participant completes 30 community-service hours and works in teams to develop a community composting site or aid an existing one.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
Participants are provided with:
- Thorough understanding of the compost process, the benefits of composting and compost use, and best management practices
- Exposure to a variety of composting methods, including vermicomposting and 3-bin system composting
- Hands-on practice using and building a variety of composting systems
- Opportunity to meet and collaborate with other community composters in the DC-MD area
- Preparation for speaking to, teaching and engaging local communities about community composting
- Knowledge, resources and support to start new community composting projects

PARTNERS WANTED: Locally based composting builds a culture of composting know-how in the community and will help lay the groundwork for municipal programs. It helps reduce the need for waste and process materials and their associated costs. ILSR and ECO City Farms are actively seeking collaborators—extension offices, local government, community garden networks, and schools—to participate in and support the growth of this program. Trainers are also available to provide customized training for specific settings such as urban farms, community gardens, churches, and schools.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT
WWW.AGRIBASE.COM/NEIGHBORHOODSOIL REBUILDERS.COM
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