



NATALIE MCGILL/THE GAZETTE

Doug Alexander of Cheverly checks on the progress of his compost pile Sept. 27. Alexander is leading an effort to get 25 percent of Cheverly's single-family households composting, which he calculates could save the town \$112,000 in landfill dumping fees during 20 years.

Turning trash into treasure

■ Resident leads effort to raise single-family home composting

BY NATALIE MCGILL
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Doug Alexander of Cheverly is on a mission to make sure his neighbors think twice before tossing another egg shell into a trash bin.

He wants them to consider a new home for the waste — a compost bin. What some consider rubbish, Alexander uses for composting, the process of turning decomposing produce and yard waste into soil for gardening.

His goal is to get 25 percent of Cheverly's single-family home owners in on the act by providing residents with discounted composting bins.

"I just believe in not wasting materials," said Alexander, who has composted for 20 years. "As much as possible, things should be recycled or composted, and I just had to figure out a way to make this work. I could see how this could work if we could get [bins] at a low enough cost."

Eliminating the price barrier to owning a bin is Alexander's goal. Since

April 2011, he has applied for and received \$4,700 in grants from sources such as the town of Cheverly — which gave him \$3,250 — and the Chesapeake Bay Trust, an environmental nonprofit.

Alexander used the money to buy \$40 bins from a Canada-based manufacturer, Horizon Plastics; he charges residents \$20 per bin, which goes back into purchasing additional bins.

Alexander said he has sold approximately 270 bins to single-family households in Cheverly, which has 1,600 such households.

"They're much more likely to use the bin if they paid something for it," said Alexander, who took composting classes through the Master Gardeners of Maryland. "They usually run as much as \$100 [from a retailer]."

If grant money continues to be available the next two years, Alexander said he anticipates that 400 of the town's 1,600 single family homes will have compost bins by 2014, saving the town \$112,000 from dumping in the county landfill over 20 years, which is the life span of a bin.

Because the town already has given Alexander multiple grants, it

might be able to give him more funding, said David Warrington, Cheverly's town administrator. The town currently pays \$115,000 annually to dump in the county landfill, Warrington said.

Alexander came up with his savings calculation based upon a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency statistic stating that the average U.S. household wastes 474 pounds of food and decomposable paper annually.

That figure, multiplied by Cheverly's 1,600 homes, equals 758,400 pounds, or 379 tons, of waste annually, he said. The county landfill tipping fee of \$59 per ton multiplied by 379 tons equals \$22,361 in savings, which is about \$14 per household. A total of 400 bins, multiplied by the \$14 savings to each home and a 20-year bin life span equals \$112,000, he said.

Cheverly resident Jennilee Miller, who bought a bin in the spring of 2011 from Alexander, said composting was a "no-brainer" for her after learning how she could use it for her garden and reduce the trash in her home.

"I would say that it's easier than we thought it would be," Miller said.

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