



New York City, New York

▲ Jodie Colón, a project manager for NYCCP, set up an Earth Machine™ in her apartment parking lot. Source: NYC Compost Project Hosted by The New York Botanical Garden



POPULATION:

8,537,673

PROGRAM START DATE:

1998

BIN TYPE AND PRICE TO RESIDENT (TAX INCLUDED)

Earth Machine™ – \$65 with optional \$20 rodent screen

Garden Gourmet – \$65

Metal can compost bins made from repurposed trash cans – \$20

Worm bin – \$55

BINS DISTRIBUTED:

20,299²⁰

TRAINING AND EDUCATION:

Training available but not required to obtain bin

Program Summary

In 1993, the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY) created the NYC Compost Project (NYCCP), which initially established compost programs at the City’s four botanical gardens. The NYCCP emerged out of several DSNY pilot studies that assessed citywide opportunities to encourage composting. After the pilot studies, DSNY determined that it was more cost effective to encourage home-based composting than to facilitate composting-specific collection services.²¹

In 1998, the NYCCP started offering subsidized Earth Machine™ compost bins for \$20 each at Compost Givebacks weekend events held twice a year in each borough. A distributor for Norseman Environmental (now ORBIS Corporation) and the manufacturer of the Earth Machine™, staffed the Givebacks and sold the bins directly to NYC residents out of a truck. Near the beginning of the program, NYCCP surveyed all residents who purchased bins and found that many had not set up their bins three months after purchase. As a result of the survey, the NYCCP concluded the \$20 they charged for each Earth Machine™ was cheap enough for residents to buy without feeling obligated to start using right away.

Today, DSNY’s Bureau of Recycling & Sustainability funds and manages the NYCCP in all five boroughs through teams hosted at NYC’s botanical gardens and three nonprofit organizations. The NYCCP’s website states that the Project’s aim is “help reduce waste in NYC and rebuild City soils by giving New Yorkers the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to produce and

20 From July 1998 to June 2016.

21 “Local Law 42: A 2012 Assessment of Composting Opportunities in NYC,” The New York City Department of Sanitation, 2012.



▲ Old metal trash cans repurposed into compost bins are available for purchase at the Lower East Side Ecology Center in NYC. The one pictured here is featured at the New York Botanical Garden Home Gardening Center in the Bronx. Source: NYC Compost Project Hosted by The New York Botanical Garden

use compost.” The project offers outreach and education on small-scale composting and provides community composting sites throughout the city with technical and networking support.

New York City does not currently subsidize bins to residents. Bins are obtained at wholesale prices and sold to residents at this price, plus tax. All five boroughs, the New York Botanical Garden, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Lower East Side Ecology Center, and the Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden offer Garden Gourmet Compost bins for \$65 and stainless steel compost cranks for \$35. The Queens Botanical Garden has Earth Machine™ compost bins available for \$65 each with an optional \$20 rodent screen, and also offers stainless-steel compost cranks for sale, which are

manufactured by Lotech Products. The Lower East Side Ecology Center also sells compost bins fashioned out of metal garbage cans for \$23 and worm bins assembled from purchased parts for \$55 that come with a pound of red wiggler worms.

NYCCP chose to offer the Garden Gourmets at more sites than the other bins because they have a smaller footprint than the Earth Machine™, making them more suitable for households with smaller backyards, and because they come boxed, which enables residents to receive them by UPS or carry them on public transit. In 2018, Garden Gourmet bins were discontinued by their manufacturer and NYCCP is currently seeking a replacement to offer to residents.

Bins Distributed

The program’s peak sales were in FY 2001 (July 2000 – June 2001) when 5,045 backyard compost bins were sold. In fiscal year 2012, the number of bins sold was 362.²² Bin sales have been under 200 each year since. The lowest sales were in fiscal year 2016, at 38 bins sold.



◀ A Garden Gourmet Bin at the NYC Botanical Gardens Compost Demonstration Site. The New York City program is the only program surveyed in this report to offer a Garden Gourmet bin. Source: Institute For Local Self-Reliance

Budget

NYCCP could not provide this information. It is difficult to separate the budget that NYCCP dedicates to home composting from the overall expenses on its many community level composting activities.

²² “Local Law 42: A 2012 Assessment of Composting Opportunities in NYC,” 42.



▲ Two program-provided Earth Machines in use at the Bainbridge Ave. Community Garden in the Bronx. Source: NYC Compost Project Hosted by The New York Botanical Garden

Staffing

DSNY funds permanent staff members at seven partner organizations.

Partners

NYCCP programs are carried out by seven DSNY-funded teams, which are hosted by partner organizations in each borough: Big Reuse, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Earth Matter NY, the Lower East Side Ecology Center, The New York Botanical Garden, Queens Botanical Garden, and Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden.

Impact and Benefits/Costs

A pilot study conducted in 1999 by DSNY found that promoting reduced priced bins to residents would likely make an insignificant impact to New York City's overall waste stream because only a small percent of the city's residents have yards and gardens.²³ Nonetheless, DSNY concluded that the program would be a cost effective way to encourage people to compost, and that, "Backyard composting also has educational benefits in that it promotes awareness of where waste goes and how it is managed."²⁴

Similarly, a report put out by the DSNY discusses how NYCCP's work in smaller scaled up source-separated organics collection program diverts more waste:²⁵

NYCCP and community composting play an important role in supporting citywide organic waste diversion through OCP [NYC's Organics Collection Program]. They raise awareness about what compost is and its benefits through outreach and education, and by using compost to grow food and care for green spaces in NYC neighborhoods. Making and using compost locally demonstrates firsthand to New Yorkers that apple cores and eggshells are not garbage—they are useful resources.²⁶

Marketing and Outreach

The home compost bins are advertised by each NYCCP site through e-newsletters, flyer distribution, and web pages. Further, NYCCP staff conduct composting outreach activities. In 2012 they attended over 500 composting outreach activities throughout New York City, where they interacted with over 10,000 people.²⁷

23 Robert Lange, "Backyard Composting in New York City: A Comprehensive Evaluation" (New York City Department of Sanitation, 1991), https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/docs/about_1999-backyard-composting_0815.pdf.

24 Ibid., 11.

25 "2014 NYC Community Composting Report" (The City of New York Department of Sanitation, n.d.), https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/docs/about_2014-community-composting-report-LL77_0815.pdf.

26 Ibid., 6.

27 Ibid.

Training and Education

Each NYCCP location offers composting workshops throughout the year (reaching over 4,000 attendees).²⁸ Workshops cover topics such as indoor and outdoor composting, building composting bins, sustainable gardening and lawn care, and caring for street trees.²⁹ For people seeking more advanced composting education, the NYCCP also offers an eight week Master Composter Certificate Program once a year in each borough. The \$40 course (with scholarships available) trains participants in the intricacies of how to create, maintain, and improve home and community-scale composting operations.³⁰

The DSNY has created a variety of educational materials to assist and encourage New York City residents, agencies, and institutions to compost. These materials include brochures and tip sheets covering a wide range of topics pertaining to backyard and worm bin composting that are available for free in PDFs online or in print form by request.³¹ The DSNY web pages also include links with information on compost drop-off sites, the city's network of community compost sites, and instructions on how to purchase home compost bins and equipment in each borough.³²

The City maintains a Compost Helpline at each host site that answers frequently asked composting questions, including how to get free compost, where to buy compost bins and accessories, and what the Master Composter Program involves. There were 1,800 calls to the Compost Helpline in FY 2012.³³

Demonstration Sites

In New York City's botanical gardens, NYCCP maintains demonstration sites that exhibit various compost systems suitable for residential backyards, schools, and community



▲ Sign introducing the New York Botanical Garden Composting Demonstration Site.
Source: Institute for Local Self-Reliance

gardens. For example, at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, NYCCP has maintained a demo site since 1993 that currently displays a Biostack, an Earth Machine™, a Garden Gourmet, and examples of homemade bins such as the circular wire mesh bin, a compost bench, a wooden two-bin system, and a repurposed trash can composter.³⁴

Through the Demonstration Site Program, NYCCP designates some of the city's most exemplary community-run composting locations as official demonstration sites. Demonstration sites must fulfill a certain amount of outreach and education each year to maintain their status. There are approximately 50 demonstration sites in New York City that hosted more than 300 activities in FY 2012. NYCCP staff help community compost sites meet composting standards needed to become a Demonstration Site.³⁵

28 "Local Law 42: A 2012 Assessment of Composting Opportunities in NYC."

29 "DSNY - Community Composting," accessed April 14, 2018, <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/our-work/reduce-reuse-recycle/community-composting>; "Local Law 42: A 2012 Assessment of Composting Opportunities in NYC."

30 "DSNY - Master Composter Certificate Program," accessed April 14, 2018, <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/contact/master-composter-certificate-course>.

31 Links to material available at: <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/our-work/reduce-reuse-recycle/resources-community-composting>

32 See, for instance, "DSNY - NYC Food Scrap Drop-Off Locations," accessed April 14, 2018, <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/services/food-scraps-and-yard-waste-page/nyc-food-scrap-drop-off-locations>.

33 "Local Law 42: A 2012 Assessment of Composting Opportunities in NYC."

34 "Home Composting Exhibit - Brooklyn Botanic Garden," accessed April 14, 2018, https://www.bbg.org/collections/gardens/home_composting_exhibit.

35 "Local Law 42: A 2012 Assessment of Composting Opportunities in NYC."



▲ A 3-bin system with informational signs on display at the Bronx Botanical Garden. Source: Institute for Local Self-Reliance



▲ Sign introducing the Governors Island composting demonstration site. Source: Institute for Local Self-Reliance

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Links

New York City Composting Project Home Page

<http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/our-work/reduce-reuse-recycle/community-composting>

Compost bin and equipment information

<http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/docs/composting-equipment-cp-equip.pdf>