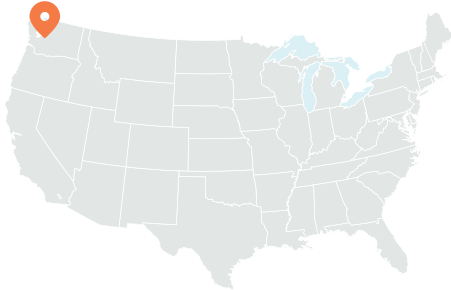




Seattle, Washington

▲ Seattle started publicly supporting composting with the first Master Composter program in the world in 1986. *Source: City of Seattle*



POPULATION:

704,352

PROGRAM START DATE:

1986

BIN TYPE AND PRICE TO RESIDENTS (PLUS TAX)

Green Cone Food Composting Bins – \$119
 Beaver State Plastics Recycler Yard Composter – \$80

BINS DISTRIBUTED:

Total N/A

TRAINING AND EDUCATION:

Training available but not required to obtain bin

Program Summary

Seattle was one of the first cities in the U.S. to have a home composting program. In 1986, the Seattle Solid Waste Utility, now the Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), created the first Master Composter program in the world in collaboration with the nonprofit Seattle Tilth Association (now Tilth Alliance). From 1990 until 1994, Seattle offered residents yard trimming composting bin delivery and educational services at no charge, and in 1993, added food waste composting bins to the program.⁴² In 1994, the City began charging a subsidized fee for both yard and food waste composters. In the very early years, the program focused on home delivery of bins and home consultation on composting education, but by the mid-1990s the program switched to centralized workshops/education and pick-up locations. By the end of 1995, approximately 23% of Seattle households had received a yard waste compost bin (see Table 1) and 4% (6,600) had received a food waste compost bin from the City.⁴³



◀ A 1994 visit by SPU to a resident's home to provide home composting education. In the past, home education visits were a pillar of Seattle's home composting program. *Source: City of Seattle*

42 Cascadia Consulting Group, Inc., "City of Seattle 1995 Home Organics Waste Management Survey" (1996), http://www.seattle.gov/util/cs/groups/public/%40spu/%40garbage/documents/webcontent/1995HOME_200312021402244.pdf, pg. 3.

43 Ibid.

Currently, SPU sells Green Cone solar digesters from Compostec (\$119) for food scraps and the Recycler Yard Composter (\$80), made by local manufacturer Beaver State Plastics, for composting yard trimmings. Residents order online or over the phone and can pick up the bins at the Seattle Conservation Corps office. For \$15, the Conservation Corps will deliver the bins to residents within City limits (up to three). SPU stocks and sells the Beaver State Plastics' yard bins because they are made with 100% locally collected recycled plastic. Previously SPU provided locally made wooden slat bins.

SPU no longer subsidizes the compost bins, but rather sells them to residents at the price SPU receives in contracts with the bin manufacturers. Seattle residents save money by purchasing the solar digesters from SPU; Green Cones sell for \$180 on the manufacturer's website.⁴⁴ Beaver State Plastics' bins are not available through standard retail outlets. In the past, the City subsidized the bins. For example, in 2008 the Green Cones were two for \$40, one for \$25, with a limit of two per household; and the yard bins were \$25 each, limited to one per household.⁴⁵

In 2011, SPU decided to stop subsidizing the backyard bins because most residents in Seattle have access to curbside collection of organic materials. Curbside collection of yard trimmings began in 1989 and food scraps collection began in 2005. Both expanded steadily (for example, yard trimmings collection reached 60% of the city in 1995), and as of 2010, 97% of Seattle had both types of curbside organics collection. Seattle's residents have been composting at home less as the rate of curbside collection has increased. Still, the City encourages backyard composting because it can reduce the number of collection trucks on the road and the fossil fuels those trucks consume.⁴⁶

TABLE 10. CUMULATIVE YARD SCRAP COMPOST BINS DISTRIBUTED IN SEATTLE (LATEST DATA AVAILABLE)

Year	1st Bin	2nd Bin
1989	6,032	0
1990	10,794	0
1991	18,110	0
1992	26,801	200
1993	31,282	450
1994	33,500	750
1995	35,102	1,107
1996	35,503	1,141

Source: Jennifer Bagby, Seattle Public Utilities, "Measuring Backyard Composting" (May 5, 1998), available online: https://www.seattle.gov/util/cs/groups/public/%40spu/%40foodyard/documents/webcontent/measuring_200312041149203.pdf

Budget

SPU's 2017 contract with Tilth Alliance was about \$85,000 for the Master Composter/Soil Builder volunteer program (Seattle only), and about \$230,000 for the Garden Hotline (which serves all of King County with information on natural yard care, including composting and compost use). SPU anticipates continuing these services going forward.

Staffing

SPU's Resource Conservation Planner manages the contract and directs outreach work with Tilth Alliance. Bin sales and distribution are managed by Seattle Conservation Corps (part of Seattle's Parks Department).

Partners

Seattle Tilth, a nonprofit organization, provides a variety of home composting educational resources.

Impact and Benefits/Costs

N/A

Marketing and Outreach

SPU no longer carries out any marketing and outreach efforts for its home composting program.

44 "Green Cone Solar Composter Digester," accessed April 27, 2018, <http://www.abundantearth.com/store/GreenConeDigester.html>.

45 Lisa Stiffler, "Cheap Compost Bins in Seattle," *Seattle Environmental News*, May 15, 2008, <http://blog.seattlepi.com/environment/2008/05/15/cheap-compost-bins-in-seattle>.

46 Personal communication, Justin Maltry, Program Coordinator, Tilth Alliance.

Training and Education

Master Composter Course

Under contract from SPU, Tilth Alliance manages a Master Composter/Soil Builder program for Seattle residents and a Garden Hotline for all of King County. Historically, the Master Composter/Soil Builder program has trained volunteers to teach others about backyard composting. It now has expanded to other resource conservation topics including recycling, natural yard care, and water quality. The once-a-year certification course encompasses 33 hours of classroom learning (including field trips), followed by 35 hours of volunteer outreach, which should be completed within one year of the training. Through Tilth Alliance, Seattle residents can request these volunteers for certain activities, such as giving hands-on clinic demonstrations, setting up informational tables at events, giving lectures or formal presentations, or providing assistance at events for sorting waste, recycling, and composting.



▲ A Master Composter course in action in Seattle in 2015. Source: Tilth Alliance

Composting Hotline and Online Materials

The Garden Hotline provides the public with phone, email, and social media access to experts on a variety of gardening, yard care, and other resource conservation topics, including composting and soil building techniques. Through the Hotline, residents can also request free hard copies of composting and gardening educational brochures. The brochures are also available on the Tilth Alliance and SPU websites. The Garden Hotline staff also research gardening practices, publish articles, and give workshops and seminars on green gardening and integrated pest management.

SPU's website includes a Backyard Composting page that offers a variety of tips and resources on composting (including links to Tilth Alliance) and provides a PDF of a composting guide booklet (see Links below). The page also provides instructions on how to construct a composting system at home.

Demonstration Sites

Tilth Alliance maintains compost demonstrations at several of its community learning site gardens. These are not funded by the City.

Tips for Replication

- Have a clear idea going in on what materials will be accepted, and what the drivers behind the program are. Will residents be composting just yard waste, or will food waste also be included? Is the focus of the program waste reduction, climate change mitigation, decreased landfill usage, or cost savings?
- Identify dependable multi-year funding, whether from waste utility, grants, or other sources, and determine the metrics those funders will require to prove success.
- Choose strategies you can afford and that will engage the most citizens. People will build their own bins if they're excited and have good information.



▲ A Master Composter course in 2015 held at one of the demonstration sites managed by Tilth Alliance. Source: *Tilth Alliance*

Contacts

David McDonald, Resource Conservation Planner, Seattle Public Utilities

Phone: 206-684-7650

Email: david.mcdonald@seattle.gov

Justin Maltry, Program Coordinator, Tilth Alliance

Phone: 206-633-0097

Email: justinmaltry@tilthalliance.org

Links

Backyard Composting page on the Seattle Public Utilities website

<http://www.seattle.gov/Util/EnvironmentConservation/MyLawnGarden/CompostSoil/Composting/index.htm>

The Garden Hotline

<http://gardenhotline.org/>

Tilth Alliance

<http://www.seattletilth.org/>

SPU Organics Waste Management Surveys 1995-2010

<http://www.seattle.gov/util/documents/reports/solidwastereports/surveys/>