

Waste Less Schools Composting FAQs

Q: What is composting and why is it important? Composting is the conversion of food scraps, plant material, and other plant-based waste (such as paper) into nutrient-enriched soil for urban landscaping and agriculture food production. Without healthy soil, our food quality and urban landscaping is compromised and stressed. Composting is important because it helps sequester carbon from the air, resulting in improved air quality and plant growth. The use of compost (the end-product of composting) on lawns and in urban gardens, as well as in farming practices, reduces water needs by up to 30%, which is important in this time of drought. Compost also contains the micro- and macro-nutrients plants need to thrive. Overall, switching to an Organics Recovery Program (aka “composting” or “food waste recycling program”) helps conserve water, improves air quality, and increases landfill diversion.

Q: How did High Point learn about this program?

A concerned High Point Academy parent used Waste Less Living’s Eco-Party Services and inquired whether the service could be expanded to an entire school on a daily basis. Soon after introducing the program to the administration, a pilot program was established for a period of two weeks. The pilot program proved successful from a logistical standpoint and, by the beginning of the next school term, a campus-wide daily Organics Recovery Program was in place. The program has been in effect since 2009 with diversion rates as high as 89% and trash generation rates as low as 6%.

Q: How long does it take to set up the program?

The initial outreach phase takes approximately one to two months to ensure that all stakeholders are familiar with the program and its benefits. Upon signing the contract, the program can be in full swing within four to six weeks. The preferred launch times are in the fall (September) and winter (January). The pilot program can run anywhere from three weeks to two months. Educational instruction begins at the same time the recovery stations and hauling services are in place.

Q: How can my school get started?

If you are hearing about Waste Less Living for the first time, planning your next event with us is the best first step as a matter of introduction to the parent community. We will document all the organics (food and other compostable material) recovered and composted, and report back to you. A Sustainability Workshop is also recommended soon after the event, to share the results and answer any questions about the campus-wide program.

You may also choose to start immediately with a one-day Lunch Audit to determine how much organics and solid waste the school is generating. The audit is designed to involve the students in the process. It is a great opportunity for students to work side-by-side with our professional team.

Q: What are the costs?

The per-student cost for the program ranges between \$30-\$40/student for the year, depending on the size of the school. It includes student education, administrative and teacher support, off-site composting services, and project management. A one-day (lunch time) audit runs between \$500-\$750, depending on the size of the school.

Q: What is the difference between commercial off-site composting and traditional composting on site?

Commercial composting occurs off site at regional facilities permitted to receive ALL food waste (meat, dairy, fish products, and cheese) and WLL's compostable tableware, as well. *On-site* composting is your traditional backyard composting of ONLY fruits, vegetables, and plant waste.

Q: Who handles the collection?

We partner with several small, local dumpster services that are permitted in the City of Pasadena and other outlying areas as they are more flexible in meeting our specific requests for level of service and handling of the material.

Q: Where does it get processed?

The material gets processed at a permitted commercial food waste composting and recycling facility in Fontana, CA, approximately 40 miles from Pasadena. The facility has been processing the material we help recover for our clients since 2012, including the compostable tableware used at the school.

Q. Can compost be used as mulch?

Mulch is merely chipped woody material (i.e., branches, twigs, leaves) applied to the surface of the soil to protect it and retain moisture. Compost is the result of decomposition of woody material, green and food waste: that is, all plant matter. Technically, yes: compost can be used as a form of mulch topically applied to landscaping. However, compost is best used as a soil amendment (to be mixed in with the soil) because it contains all the nutrients the plants need for growth.

Q: Why not use commercial fertilizers?

Some disadvantages of using commercial or chemically synthesized fertilizers are: 1) they derive their nutrient base from synthetic compounds and not from naturally occurring organic matter; 2) they require more fossil fuels to produce, resulting in more

greenhouse gas emissions during production; 3) overuse of chemical fertilizers results in increased in water contamination from runoff into storm drains; 4) commercial fertilizers contain ingredients that can affect the respiratory system and may also cause adverse skin reactions.

Q. What about vermicomposting, or composting in worm bins?

Vermicomposting is a great way to process fruit and vegetable scraps on site. The bins are low-maintenance, require little space, and are a great science teaching tool. They can also produce a liquid (worm tea) that can be beneficially used on plants.

Q: Why isn't the City of Pasadena more involved in programs like this?

The City of Pasadena Public Works Department is involved with developing a city-wide Zero-Waste Master Plan that will help identify policies and programs which would help the City reach its goal of zero waste by 2040. The City has knowledge of this program and has been focusing on residential composting and recycling over the last few years. With the passing of AB 1826 back in 2014, the City is pursuing opportunities to provide organics collection in the near future through its franchise hauling system.

Q. Where can I learn more about composting?

Association of Compost Producers

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

US Composting Council

<http://compostingcouncil.org/>

County of Los Angeles Public Works, Smart Gardening Program

<http://dpw.lacounty.gov/epd/sq/>

Waste Less Living, Inc.

www.wastelessliving.com

Q: Where can I get some compost for my lawn and garden?

Bagged: Home Depot, OSH, local nursery

Bulk:

<http://crownvalleynursery.com/> Pasadena, CA

<http://www.calblendsoils.com/> Irwindale, CA

<http://foothillsoils.com/> Newhall, CA