

# Composting; It's Not a Waste

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## Background

Composting converts the waste you produce into the rich soil needed to grow the food you eat, all while saving the environment in the process.

## Landfill vs. Compost

Decomposition: Through the anaerobic decomposition of solid waste in landfills, methane is released into the air. Due to the greenhouse effect, methane traps the heat in our atmosphere, thus increasing global temperatures. However, composting does not increase temperatures because methane is not released in the aerobic decomposition used to break down the organic material. Instead, composting produces a rich soil with many nutrients and living organisms that benefit the plants living in the soil.

Space: With 4.6 million tons of waste produced by Wisconsin citizens yearly (“What a Waste?” 2015), landfills occupy significant amounts of space and endanger surrounding natural resources. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, about 50% of our waste can be composted (2013).



## Compost in our community

Currently, options are available for residents to begin composting in their backyards. Anything from rotten food and food scraps to greasy cardboard can all be thrown into a bin where, over time, rich brown soil is produced.



Large organization like Milwaukee Area Technical College, Outpost Natural Foods and Lakefront Brewery have begun composting on a large scale by hiring a compost pick-up service, Compost Crusader.

Due to the high volumes of organic waste production from these businesses, we were inspired to dig deeper and study the waste management habits in our community.

### **Our Study**

To study commercial composting, we hope to partner with Compost Crusaders, a Milwaukee-based, large-scale composting service. With Compost Crusaders, we would record composting habits of 10 local restaurants for seven days, before and after education. The data collected would provide information to assist in the creation of policy to effectively implement commercial composting in Milwaukee.

### **Current Results**

Compost Crusader has provided our research team with their customer's monthly waste amounts. A total of 245,576 pounds of compost was diverted from 17 restaurants in 2015. The total amount of compost diverted was 761,331 pounds in 2015. The mayor of Milwaukee, Tom Barrett, hopes to reach 40% of compost diversion by the year 2020.

### **Futures plans**

We only managed to have three restaurants participate, which would not provide enough consistent data. To address this, we will send out a preliminary survey on waste management habits and knowledge to independent restaurants. We will then provide education to the restaurants and then subsequently have the restaurants fill out a post-education survey.

### **Citations Needed from:**

[Compost bin]. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2016, from <http://sustainablejc.org/images/compostbin.jpg>

[Compost Crusade truck]. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2016, from <http://nebula.wsimg.com/9bfdc9151a99e6b0ce4ff783e81da8d8?AccessKeyId=925F08F6A927D18E95D9&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

What a Waste? (n.d.). Retrieved April 04, 2016, from <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/ee/earth/recycle/waste.htm#end>

