

# School Compost System Startup Steps

Starting a school compost system is no small task. A committed team from the school and beyond is needed to ensure success. Please answer, or attempt to answer, the questions below with all relevant stakeholders as a group.

This document is designed for your team to create a compost system on your own by problem solving through some commonly asked questions and ideas! You can find more resources at [growmorewasteless.com](http://growmorewasteless.com). If you work through this document and still would like consultative support from Cat Buxton, please reach out at [cat@growmorewasteless.com](mailto:cat@growmorewasteless.com)

## School Information

Name of School/Town

Primary contact information for this project

Describe the school (grades taught, student count, staff count, teacher to student ratios, mission of the school, private or public, in a city or rural area, etc.)

Describe the location of the school (close to roadways, on a hillside, open field, wooded lot, paved lot, etc.). Developing a working map of the school property with information on utilities, current land use, waterways, and more may be helpful at this stage.

Describe the local community in relation to the school (are there lots of community volunteers, active parents, activities at the school are well-attended, donations from local businesses common?)

## Vision

Who wants the school compost system and why?

Who: Administrators, teachers, students, cafeteria staff or food service, facilities and maintenance staff, parents, nurses, librarians, farmers, community volunteers, school board, etc?

- Do you have a team (ideally 2-5 members) that is committed to this project; who is on this team?
- Will students be involved in helping to manage the system, or this only for adults?
- Is your goal to compost on school property or to send food scraps off property for composting elsewhere?
- Do you currently have service from a hauler or a farmer to collect food scraps? If so, who are you contracting services with? *A contact name/number is helpful.*

Why:

- Teaching students through curriculum: science, math, biology, waste reduction, watershed education, history, climate change, place-based education, spontaneous learning, etc.
- Managing waste
- Reducing costs
- Physical education, getting students outside
- Increasing the involvement of the community in the school

Why not: What are fears/reservations about a school compost system (pests, work, coordination, smell etc.)?

Why now: Why are you interested in getting serious about the school compost system project now? Have resources become available, need recognized, staff changeovers, etc.?

## Food Scrap Information

Have you started collecting food scraps? If so, answer the questions below. If not, please estimate or set up a monitoring process to determine these values.

- What is the rough daily/weekly volume from the kitchen? *We'll want to see both daily and weekly to determine frequency needs.*
- What is the rough daily/weekly weight/volume in 5 gallons from the cafeteria, classrooms, and teachers lounge?
- What is the rough breakdown ratio (meat, dairy, citrus, fruit, cooked food, vegetables, liquids, coffee grounds)
- Would you say the overall compost collected is wet or dry?

## Compost Program Design

### Option 1

If you are only intending to collect food scraps and send them off-site for composting elsewhere, the considerations for the system include:

- Sorting processes within the school
  - Cafeteria, lounges, classrooms, kitchen, etc.
- Temporary storage - until hauler can retrieve scraps on a regular basis.

Please skip over Option 2 if you do not intend to compost on-site.

### Option 2

If you are intending to compost on-site, do you have a location on the school property where the compost system will be able to be installed and maintained? Some things to consider when analyzing your school property for a suitable location:

- Choose a spot with high visibility for the public if desired
- Choose a spot close to the school
- Ensure easy access for teachers, students, and volunteers
- Choose a spot with an outdoor spigot nearby - water source must be very convenient
- Ideally, a spot that is not vegetated currently (lawn, forest, gardens, etc) is preferred (choose a paved surface or bare ground if possible)
- Avoid damp spots and steep spots
- Avoid areas where there may be problems such as wells, septic systems, and in-ground tanks
- Avoid areas where people and/or pests may threaten the compost system
- Avoid areas close to waterways i.e. rivers, streams, stormwater swales that go directly into pipes
- Avoid areas where roof runoff may negatively impact the compost system. Consider extending the roof to create a cover for the compost area.
- Avoid areas that are already being used constructively for school activities and cannot be relocated

Other things to consider for on-site composting systems:

- What are you going to do with the finished compost that you create?
  - Use for on-site gardens, donate to community gardens, sell for fundraiser, donate to farms
- Do you have enough available space to compost all of your current food scraps?
- What will you do if food scrap volumes increase?
- Would it be useful to have an off-site entity collect food scraps some times - to feed to farm animals or add into their own compost systems to keep compost volumes and tasks reasonable?

## Resources

Compost systems require more than just food scraps. Determine a budget to estimate the expenses that you will need to be able to cover to have a successful system. Some things you may need:

for Options 1 and 2:

- sorting systems:
  - additional containers within the school
  - signage and educational materials for sorting
- storage systems
  - additional large containers
  - area of the school (inside or outside) where food scraps can be collected into before being composted (on- or off-site)
- curriculum
- outside consultants/staff

for Option 2 only:

- wood, fabric, hardware, styrofoam/insulation, etc. for bins
- dry carbon materials i.e. sawdust, wood chips, leaves, shredded paper, manure and bedding from a local farm *(You'll need about 3 times more of the amount of various carbon materials than the food scraps that are produced.)*

- covered space and containers to store dry carbon materials throughout all seasons (cannot freeze in winter if high water content)
- thermometer(s)
- hoses for water
- shovels (adult and kid friendly)
- tools to maintain systems (drills, saws, etc.)
- gloves

*Keep in mind that the volume of these materials will depend on the volume of food scraps coming out of the school system.*

Once you've completed your expected expenses budget, consider your available resources.

- Do you have startup funding available? If so, how much?
- Do you have ongoing funding available? If so, how much?
- What types of resources, besides funding, do you have available at the school (currently or in the future)?
- Are there supporting businesses/organizations to partner with in your area? (ie: hardware stores, farms, nursery or garden center, master gardeners, garden clubs, quarry)
- Are there grants or other programs that could supplement funding?

## Moving Forward

Once you've worked through some of these design elements, it's time to document a plan. Build upon it as you go. Be very clear with instructions and inclusive in the evolutionary development of the plan.

Plan should include:

- Timeline for project implementation
- Task assignments and responsibilities, including schedule
- Contact information
- Communication protocols
  - Within team
  - To larger community
  - PR plan - *Consider who will take photographs and write press releases or letters to the editor. Be sure to follow school policy about parental permission to use images.*
  - Consider your system for requesting and thanking donors
- Define the rules and protocols of the compost system: Have clear, posted signs
- Curriculum to go along with compost system
- Maintenance schedule: turning compost, moving buckets, collecting dry materials, recording data, etc.
- Volunteer and staff training needs/recruitment/requirements/schedule
- Continuity plan if Compost Team leaders leave
- Compost journal or log. *Have a means of collecting, storing, and sharing data, experiences, and lessons learned*
- Budget. Record funds and in-kind donations and expenses