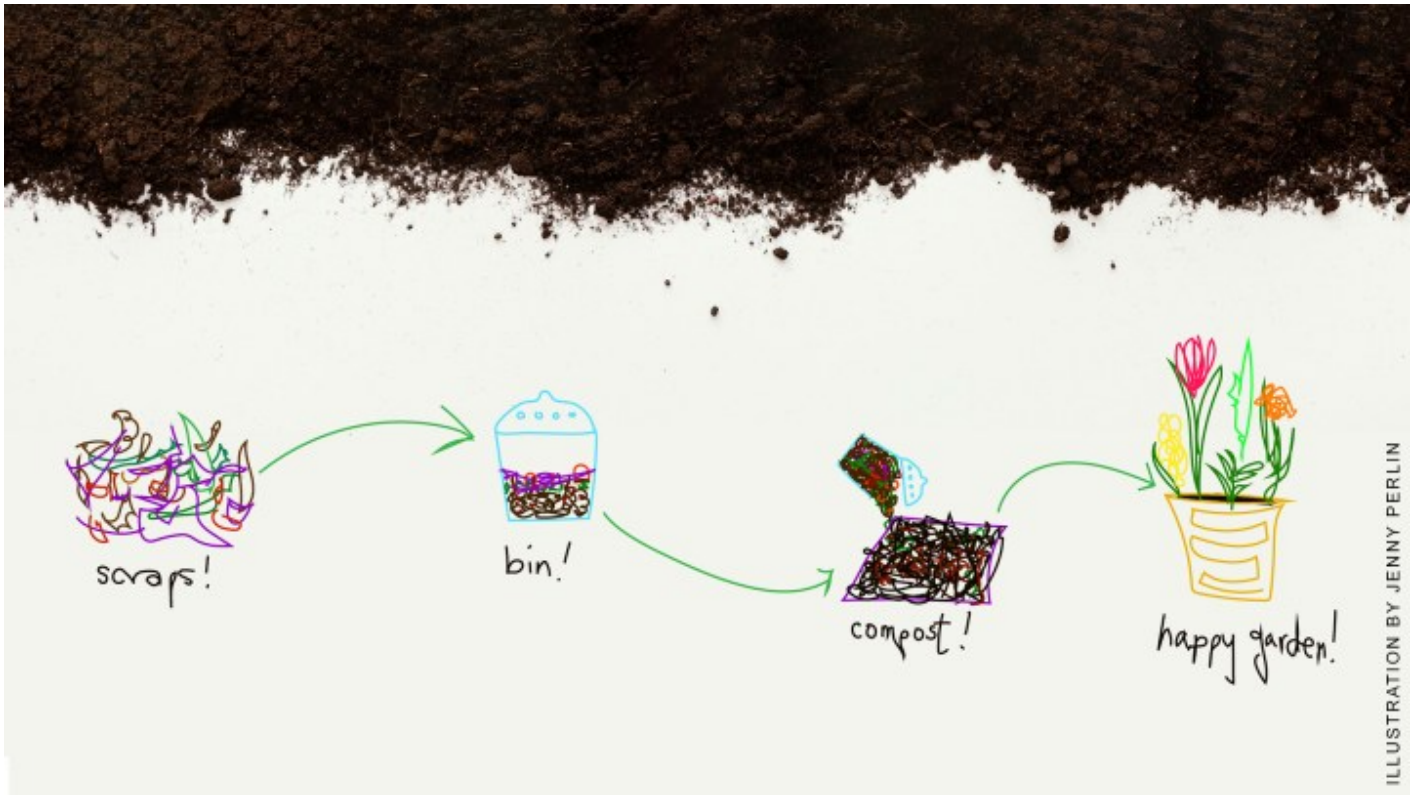
COMPOST REDUCES LANDFILL SIZE AND MAKES PLANTS HAPPY

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By Travis Hartman

Often referred to by farmers and gardeners as “Black Gold,” compost is a natural product made by recycling food scraps and organic matter—like leaves or yard clippings—into a valuable fertilizer that provides beneficial nutrients to plants and enriches the soil. The process of composting takes the natural process of decomposition and turbocharges it by creating a perfect environment that allows bacteria, fungi and other decomposing organisms to break down the organic matter.



Herbs and other plants available for purchase at the Coop.

GOT ROOM IN YOUR YARD? OR YOUR FREEZER?

Creating compost on your own is no complex task. You simply need an outdoor space to let the material sit and decompose in peace—as well as a certain amount of patience, as it is a months-long process. Keep it moist and stir; a managed pile decomposes to a finished product more quickly, taking about six to eight weeks.

There is an indoor method called vermiculture, which uses a container that holds your food waste and is home to a group of friendly worms. These worms will digest your leftovers to make compost.

COMPOST EXPERT

The most direct benefit of making your own compost is the rich fertilizer that will nourish plants and help them reach their full potential. Currently, the Coop is featuring young blueberry, blackberry, and raspberry starters along with all manner of herbs, flowers and seeds to sow in any pot or patch of ground you may have available. Sara

Matthews, a member since 1992, has been a dedicated compost maker for decades. “We bought the biggest garden we could find with a house attached,” she said with a smile.

“THE COOP CAN AVERAGE UP TO 250 POUNDS OF COMPOST MATERIAL PER DAY.”

—***COOP RECEIVING COORDINATOR JOSEPH GORDON***

Matthews has seen the soil in her garden become quite manageable, noting that after so many years of adding compost, “the shovel just goes in like butter.” She also believes the flowers, herbs and shrubs she has in her garden love the added fertilizer. “With all those beneficial microorganisms, it’s just a big symphony going on in the soil!”



Growing kits available at the Coop.

Beyond helping plants, another benefit of compost is keeping waste out of the landfill. Matthews estimates that she has cut her garbage in half since starting to compost.

FIGHTING GREENHOUSE GASSES

Food waste in a landfill will break down—but organic material on the surface will decompose via different organisms in an oxygen-rich versus an oxygen-poor environment. Material in landfills is often buried deeply enough that oxygen resources are limited, and the types of organisms that go to work will create methane and carbon dioxide as byproducts, which are potent greenhouse gasses. Most landfills have ways to capture some of this gas, but not all of it—landfills are the third-largest source of human-generated methane emissions in the U.S.



Composting at GrowNYC.

In the city, not everyone is fortunate enough to have a backyard in which to compost, or even enough space to house a box of friendly worms inside. City residents can still reduce what they're sending to the landfill, by taking food waste to designated drop-off sites around Brooklyn every week. The Old Stone House has a compost program allowing the public to bring food scraps to their bins. Another option is the curbside composting program run in certain areas by the Department of Sanitation.

People may store food waste for composting in the fridge or freezer to avoid odors, or buy a small compost pail to keep on a countertop. These pails often have charcoal filters, which reduce odors.

COOP COMPOSTING


BK ROT
COMPOST
100%
•LOCALLY SOURCED•
•HANDMADE IN BUSHWICK•
bkrot.org
$6.25
Bk Rot Compost - 1lb
PHOTO BY NANCY ROSENBERG

Bags of compost packaged by BK ROT, available for purchase at the Coop.
And if you don’t want to compost yourself, but still want to help your plants, there is compost available for purchase at the Coop. The only brand the Coop carries is from a local company named BK ROT. This company uses food scraps leftover from the Coop and other sources to create its compost—creating a full circle of conservation.

The Coop has a system for sorting food and scraps that are not viable for selling on the floor, and sets aside food that can be donated to CHIPS or one of several community fridges in Brooklyn. Other types of organic material—think corn husks left in the bottom of the bin, or a melon that has gone past its prime—get composted.

> COMPOSTING TAKES THE NATURAL PROCESS OF DECOMPOSITION AND TURBOCHARGES IT, CREATING A PERFECT ENVIRONMENT ALLOWING BACTERIA, FUNGI AND OTHER DECOMPOSING ORGANISMS TO BREAK DOWN ORGANIC MATTER.

Coop Receiving Coordinator Joseph Gordon estimates that the Coop can average around 250 pounds of compost material per day. “Before, it was all going into the garbage,” Gordon said, “That’s no small thing.” The composting system has been in place since the 80’s; Coop compost is distributed to various local community gardens, as well as BK ROT.

BUY IT INSTEAD OF MAKING IT

BK ROT has been sold at the Coop for several years now. The company entered a service contract with the Coop to provide organic material in the summer of 2021. BK ROT describes itself as a “community-centered, closed-loop, fossil-fuel-free approach to hauling and composting food waste in NYC.”

The company is staffed by young people of color, and makes pickups via bicycle, to avoid the use of fossil fuels and increase its environmental friendliness.

“Working with teenagers, it’s been amazing,” says Sandy Nurse, founder of BK ROT, on the company’s website. Nurse, who is now a member of the New York City Council representing Cypress Hills, Bushwick, City Line, Ocean Hill, Brownsville and East New York adds, “I’m just blown away by how much they know and how much they teach me.”

SIGN UP FOR COMPOSTING SHIFTS

The Compost Committee is looking for members with vehicles to haul buckets of food scraps to various gardens. Contact the Compost Committee team leader at 718-398-4454 to inquire about positions. It’s a great gig with outside work in beautiful gardens.

Travis Hartman has been a member for over a decade, and over the years has worked shifts on every floor of the Coop.