

COMPOST REDUCES LANDFILL SIZE AND MAKES PLANTS HAPPY

May 31, 2022



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 gases. 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.



IMAGE FROM @GROWN NYC INSTAGRAM

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



6 7027483842 7
Bk Rot Compost - 1lb
\$6.25

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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.”

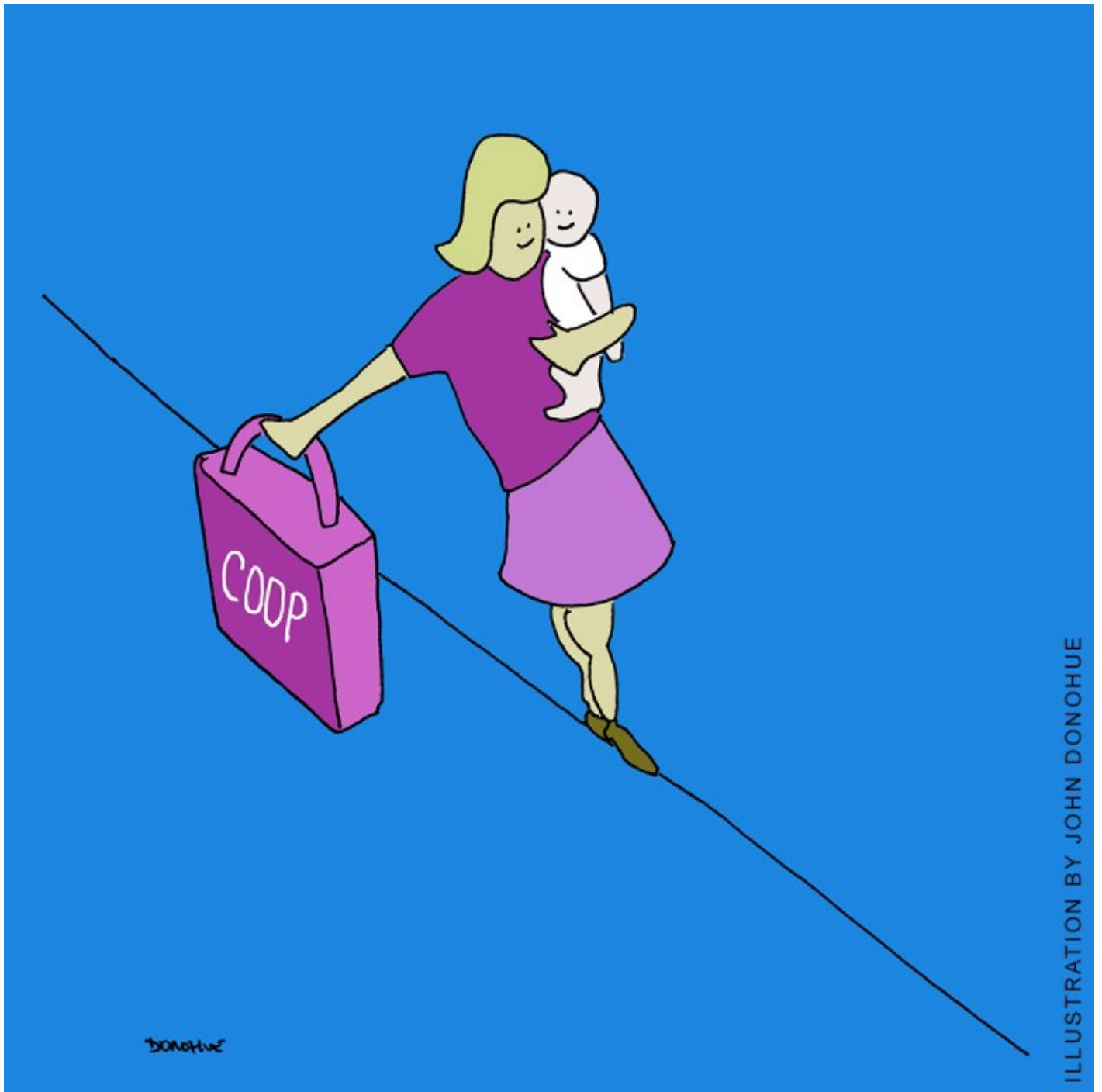
SIGN UP FOR COMPOSTING SHIFTS

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.

SINGLE MOMS STRUGGLING TO FIND COOP SHIFTS

May 31, 2022



BY HAYLEY GORENBERG

The high-wire act of snagging and balancing Coop work shifts, while being a single parent of young children—especially in an era when the Coop lacks childcare—took center ring in the Coop Confidential Facebook group in recent weeks, with many single mothers venting their frustration about whether or not they are truly welcome at the store.

WORKING SHIFTS

In April, changes in work shifts extended work cycles, and adjusted the release of new shift opportunities, so they trickle out more steadily over time—rather than flooding online at odd hours, and quickly getting scooped up. The Coop also considered the return of reliably recurring shifts in July. But these improvements still left mothers of young children jockeying for swaps through flurries of social media posts, and wishing for both structured flexibility to swap shifts, and childcare coverage at the Coop. Some said they had felt unwelcome at the Coop from the start.

“I don’t mind working at all, but it’s a little bit complicated, and they’re not flexible,” said Alla Tice, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union who joined the Coop in 2018, motivated in large part by stellar tomatoes. “‘Wonderful tomatoes!’ That’s what everyone said at orientation. The food is amazing. The choice is amazing. Prices are good. It’s three small blocks away, my local supermarket.”

Tice, a self-described “single mother by choice” of two children, now four and almost eight years old, said she was dismayed to be met with suspicion about her household from the outset. When she first arrived at the Coop and explained that she was the only adult in a household with two children, she said the response was incredulous, “Yeah. Right.” She felt she was being tacitly accused of lying.

THE COOP SHOULD INSTITUTE A “GRACE PERIOD,” TO ALLOW SINGLE PARENTS WHO LACK ROUTINE CHILD CARE TO REMAIN MEMBERS.

—*KIKI RAKOWSKY, COOP MEMBER*

She forged ahead anyway, and did appreciate the Coop’s parental leave policy, applied when her younger child was born. After her leave, she got some help from her mother, or from friends on occasion, and successfully worked checkout for almost a

year, before COVID-19 put member work on hiatus. But when member work resumed, with the childcare room shut down indefinitely, and other care options constrained by COVID risks, she started to struggle with meeting shift requirements. She stopped by the Coop office to try and work out a solution—and described speaking with an individual in the office—who, she said, told her, “Maybe the Coop is not for you.”



Shopping with a baby in a stroller along the produce section of the Coop.

BANKING SHIFTS

Tice scrambled to bank shifts for a full week when she had childcare in early 2022. She said she worked so steadily that a staff member asked whether she had joined as a paid employee. But with her banked shifts running out, Tice said she checks “almost every day” for shifts she can manage—and she’s having a hard time finding them. She rhapsodizes about the childcare room: “My daughter loved it! They got bagels. They played. I know my youngest now, she would appreciate it.” However,

she vacillated in her feelings about a childcare space during the era of COVID. “I’m not sure how I would feel about bringing back childcare—but I would still say it would be really nice if childcare were available. It would be helpful.”

I DON’T MIND WORKING AT ALL, BUT IT’S A LITTLE BIT COMPLICATED, AND THEY’RE NOT FLEXIBLE.

—*ALLA TICE, COOP MEMBER*

Ultimately, she wondered about the possibility of a documented proof of need for excuse from work during a period of time, comparing the situation to excusing jurors who are primary caretakers of young children. “I don’t want to sound lazy,” she hurried to add. “I don’t want to sound like I want to avoid work.”

LOOKING FOR A SHIFT



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

Coop member and single mother Kiki Rakowsky, a Coop Confidential member, also advocated for lessened shift requirements with documented proof of need—perhaps a tax return excerpt showing that a parent is “head of household” with young dependents. Rakowsky likened searching for shifts that worked in her schedule to buying choice concert tickets the moment they are released. She said fellow Coop members told her to “wake up early, 4 or 4:30,” to find “plenty of slots.”

Rakowsky, a funeral director, said, “I don’t have the privilege of knowing when I’m going to be at work. Let’s say I schedule a shift four weeks in advance—and someone dies?” In the absence of a formal shift-swapping procedure, even the revisions to the work slot system fall short of addressing her need for flexibility. “It’s almost like the Coop has turned into ‘Lord of the Flies,’” she exclaimed. “Kill or be killed there! Eat or be eaten! Everyone’s stretched really thin.”

A Coop member for more than a decade, Rakowsky brought her now-seven-year-old to the Coop in a baby carrier, and nursed him during her checkout shift, until he was old enough to go to Coop childcare.

ON LEAVE

Part of the “sandwich generation,” Rakowsky now also takes care of her father—and she is on leave until June for that reason. She said she’s not sure how she will maintain her membership after her leave ends—but she remains convinced the Coop can solve the problem.



Pushing a baby in a stroller along the busy bulk section of the Coop.

“I think it’s an amazing institution,” she said. “I think it’s a great place with great people, and the model has worked for so long and so many.” She pointed out that the pandemic has laid bare the deficits in many systems, including, but not limited to, PS-FC. “It’s nothing against the Coop,” she said. “I sing the praises of the Coop! The Coop should be modeling how to shop for all of its members. If we had elderly shopping on Thursday mornings, why haven’t we solved for single parents? You can’t pick and choose which marginalized community to solve for. When I hear that people can no longer shop at the Coop because of their single-parent status, I’m with you!” she said. “We have to have the intellectual wherewithal to come up with a solution.” Until then, she suggested the Coop should institute a “grace period,” to allow single parents who lack routine child care to remain members. For now, she said, “I’m just tired!”

COOP CHILDCARE ON HOLD



The Coop bulk room.

PSFC Membership Coordinator Matt Hoagland, on staff for more than 17 years, acknowledged childcare at the Coop was on hold “indefinitely”—because of COVID concerns, but also because using the space for bulk processing equipment has radically improved packaging bulk items, to the point where what was once a week’s worth of work can be accomplished in a day. That capacity is all the more critical when COVID safety measures necessitate moving shoppers efficiently through the high-volume bulk aisle, “traditionally one of the worst aisles for traffic.”

Hoagland deemed creating a system for excusing single parents of young children from work slots “above pay grade” for his position—meaning it would require a rule change. Noting that he grew up in a household headed by his single mother, he asked, “How much can we get into the management of people’s lives? It’s hard, and some of the answers don’t sound friendly at times.”

He also pointed out that even when childcare existed at the Coop, pre-pandemic, there was no guarantee it would be open or available at any particular time. “If we didn’t have workers, we didn’t have childcare, and that was what it was. So there were always limits on it.”

Hoagland expressed hope that newly available recurring shift options and improvements to online scheduling would help single parents, but acknowledged that there’s currently “no adequate answer.” He said, “We’re hoping people do the best they can. We’re making our way, trying to figure out what will work for most of our members—whether that’s single parents, hardcore planners, people who don’t plan very well, or people who only think of their status when they’re about to be suspended.”



Bags of produce being prepared for bulk sale.

Hayley Gorenberg is a journalist-turned-civil-rights-lawyer and Floridian--turned-Brooklynite.

THE CROSSWORD

May 31, 2022



David Levinson-Wilk

IMPROVING EQUITY AT THE COOP

May 31, 2022

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editors,

ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Consistent recognition of opportunities to be and do better for the collective good is an important part of our Coop's legacy. While past efforts to pursue diversity and equality are appreciated, contemporary objectives pertaining to anti-racism and equity must be jointly defined and clearly communicated moving forward. At this inflection point, we need a shared understanding of what diversity and equality means, and how this lives at the PSFC. Participation and accountability are fundamental to equity; members and leaders across the organization and its committees should be trained around these mutual goals, with information easily accessible and disseminated to our community.

The Coop must facilitate clear governance and informed decision-making, particularly as we navigate the new normals and unintentional silos created by the pandemic. - Transitioning the general meeting online was a prudent step in this direction, and making digitized transcriptions of minutes available would better enable members to learn about issues under consideration and revisit the context of resolutions reached. Recording future meetings could be an excellent inaugural use of the PSFC YouTube channel, which was established in May 2020 and is linked on our homepage, yet currently contains no content.

We are invested in cultivating an egalitarian, engaged environment that engenders belonging and improves the Coop for all members. With the board elections approaching, we advocate voting for candidates committed to working collaboratively to implement forward-thinking plans that prioritize racial justice and equity. These issues are tantamount to fiscal solvency, and the future of our Coop is at stake.

Signed,

Christhian Diaz, Mandira Ghai, Annabelle Heckler, Leigh Howard, Raj Kottamasu and Trish Adobea Tchume