



Food Scrap Recycling at Multi-Family Properties

Case Study: Friends House Retirement Community



Background

The Friends House Retirement Community is 62 rolling acres of retirement living located in Sandy Spring, Maryland. Established in 1967, Friends House provides affordable homes for low to moderate income seniors.

In 1967, Friends House consisted of 100 apartments, four wings with 25 apartments and an additional wing for administrative offices and shared common areas. Since then, the property has expanded to include 31 freestanding cottages and assisted living and skilled nursing care units.

Operating under the Quaker Religious Society of Friends, Friends House is guided by the values of simplicity, peace and nonviolence, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship and sustainability. These values are reflected in Friends House commitment to environmental consciousness. In the mid-1980s, residents who were avid farmers decided to set up a sizable kitchen garden. During this time, they built four sturdy compost bins, and started collecting and composting food scraps, and this process continues today.



Process

At Friends House, food scrap recycling collection containers are placed in the kitchen for staff use and in each apartment wing for resident use. A designated resident of Friends House, Lucille Ridlon, manages the food scraps recycling program which entails recruiting volunteers and organizing a collection schedule.

Resident volunteers are responsible for collecting the food scraps and transporting them to the proper compost bin in the on-site garden. Volunteers chop up larger bits of food as necessary, cover the food scraps with several inches of leaves, wash the food scrap collection containers, and return the containers to the designated areas.

The maintenance director, Bob Hill, turns over and mixes the piles within each compost bin and transfers compost when necessary. When food scraps and leaves in Bin #1 begin to break down, Mr. Hill transfers the material to Bin #3 for active composting. Depending on the food scraps themselves and the temperature of the compost pile, the materials in Bin #3 might need to be turned several times before the compost product is ready for use. Bin #2 is used to store leaves, which are used to cover the food scraps in Bin #1.



Food Scrap Recycling Program/Composting Involvement: (left to right) Assistant Director for Culinary Services - Davena Marques, Former Resident and Clerk of the Garden Committee - Beth Morrison, Resident and Compost Manager - Lucille Ridlon, and Maintenance Director - Bob Hill

Beth Morrison, a former resident and Clerk of the Garden Committee, which oversees the food scraps recycling program. In addition to volunteering time to transport the food scraps from the kitchen and apartment wings to the compost pile, the clerk communicates with the kitchen and maintenance staff to ensure they are trained and educated on both the food scrap recycling collection and composting processes.

Four compost bins are made to accommodate the varying stages of the composting process at Friends House.



Bin #1: Start Compost

Food scraps are added to a compost bin and covered with leaves.



Bin #2: Leaves

Storage for leaves used to cover food scraps in Bin #1.



Bin #3: Active Compost

Do not disturb unless specified to 'turn over' or mix.



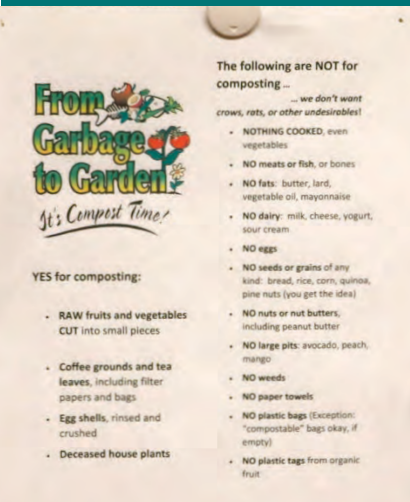
Bin #4: Finished Compost

Ready for use. Community produce plots have priority.

Education

Friends House uses the Home and Garden Information Center website for providing further educational materials on its composting program. Additional staff education is provided by resident and current compost manager, Ms. Ridlon. Ms. Ridlon also completed Master Gardener training with a specialty in composting. Friends House welcomes other local Master Gardeners to visit the property to teach the science and art of composting and gardening.

Acceptable and unacceptable materials for recycling



When new residents move in, Friends House provides them with information on their food scrap recycling collection program, including what can and cannot be composted on the property. Informational flyers also are posted throughout the property displaying this information.

New residents also learn how to get

involved with gardening on-site, join the gardening committee, and volunteer in the program.

Results

Friends House has consistently recycled nearly 30,000 pounds of food scraps per year since 2014. When the food scraps and leaves are fully composted, residents and staff are welcome to use it as they desire. Though community produce plots have priority (consisting of 12 raised beds), residents still find there is enough to use in their personal gardens and raised beds around their cottages.

Benefits

While Friends House saves money on their waste disposal collection costs by keeping food scraps out of their waste stream, there are other benefits as well. Composting at Friends House improves community relationships, allows residents to be outside and active, and provides an opportunity for continuous learning.



Friends House community garden

In addition, by composting Friends House is creating a soil amendment that can be used in community and personal gardens. Use of these recycled food scraps as compost improves soil health and structure; reduces runoff from rain and melting snow; increases drought resistance; and reduces the need for added water and commercial fertilizers.

Opportunities & Lessons Learned

Education was a major challenge with the collection of food scraps at Friends House. Residents often forget which types of materials can and cannot be recycled. This was successfully addressed through constant communication with staff and residents, regular updates to flyers displaying acceptable food scraps and other acceptable organic materials, and monitoring and inspection of collected food scraps.

The composting process itself can be physically demanding. At Friends House, a limited number of residents are physically capable of transporting food scraps to the compost bins, resulting in a limited number of volunteers. Developing a schedule helps with maintaining the appropriate number of volunteers as the population changes.

Next Steps

In 2017, Friends House started a redevelopment project to accommodate the growing senior population. The expansion not only created additional housing options, such as new cottages and apartments, but it also included environmentally sustainable initiatives for the existing community, grounds, and new buildings. These initiatives include efficient storm water management; biodiversity and natural features; and sustainable operations and maintenance, among others.



New lodge apartments and environmentally sustainable initiatives included in the redevelopment project will increase the amount of food scraps generated



The redevelopment project will increase the number of residents and the amount of food scraps generated for the food scrap recycling program. The four original compost bins created in the 1980s can easily accommodate additional amounts of food scraps. With more residents, a larger pool of volunteers can likely participate in the food scrap recycling collection and composting program.

Recommendations

For multi-family properties considering a food scrap recycling program, or specifically, a composting program, Friends House suggests finding in-house gardeners! Whether they are staff or residents, gardeners will likely appreciate the process. They may even have experience and knowledge which could help in the development of your program. If experience and knowledge is lacking at your property, Friends House encourages reaching out to local Master Gardeners. A Master Gardener can visit the property and teach residents and staff the science and art of gardening, including anything from composting basics to composting tips and tricks. This will jump-start your food scrap recycling program.

**For more information visit
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/recycling or call 3-1-1 or 240-777-0311**



**Montgomery County, Maryland • Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Solid Waste Services • Waste Reduction and Recycling Section**

This information is available in an alternative format by calling 240-777-6446.