QUEENS
CLIMATE PROJECT

A HOW TO GUIDE

SUCCESSFUL CO-OP COMPOSTING

QUEENS CLIMATE PROJECT | COMPOST TASKFORCE

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INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, co-ops in Jackson Heights have been dedicated community composters, successfully recycling organic waste and diverting organics from landfills. By composting, our co-op communities reduce carbon emissions and help enrich the soil in our gardens, street tree beds, and other green spaces in the neighborhood.

This residential-based, community composting approach includes additional perks and benefits: the convenience of on-site composting seven days a week, savings on compost costs for gardening, and the use of the co-op property's autumn leaves in the composting process, which keeps them out of the NYC waste stream.

In this How-To Guide, we share five key factors for starting a successful co-op compost site, followed by five case studies, sample proposals and spreadsheets, and a resource section. These five case studies of co-op-based compost sites, range from 10+ years old to newly established. From this guidance you will be ready to run your own co-op composting site and join our growing movement.

KEY FACTORS

Site
Volunteers
Budget
Systems
Approval

CASE STUDIES

Dunolly Gardens
The Towers
The Madison
The Griswold
The Berkeley

KEY FACTORS

Are you ready to run a successful co-op compost site? Here are the five key factors you will want to consider when preparing a co-op compost project proposal and site plan. Drawn from others' how-to guides and the direct experience of local co-op compost coordinators, we incorporate guidance from nationally recognized Best Management Practices for community composting from the NYC Compost Project (DSNY), the Institute for Local Self Reliance (ILSR), and books on composting, which are also available as links in the *Resources* section.

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1. Site: Do you have a suitable site location?

- an adequate site on the co-op property, taking into account the close proximity to residents' apartments
- a space within the site for compost bin(s) and bin for leaves (browns)
- a separate dry/indoor space to store browns and tools for compost tasks
- nearby green spaces and/or gardens owned by the property that can use the finished compost you will produce

2. VOLUNTEERS: Do you have the people power?

- a team of volunteers to manage the compost site and problem-solve effectively
- at least one volunteer knowledgeable about composting basics (Master Composter Certification helpful, but not required)
- committed volunteers who will follow best management practices for communication, neighbor diplomacy, and guiding others
- committed volunteers capable of the physical labor required for compost tasks such as: chopping, aerating, sifting, and spreading finished compost

3. BUDGET: Do you have financial resources and/or fundraising abilities?

- sufficient resources and/or fundraising abilities to purchase start-up compost equipment, tools, and supplies
- start small to pilot a new site, test and learn, then scale up when most ready

4. SYSTEMS: What bin(s) to choose and compost capacity?

- type and size of bin(s) is best for your site, people power, goals, etc.:
  - Enclosed bin (e.g., Earth Machine, Garden Gourmet, Joraform Tumbler) 3-bin system (e.g., "Vancouver System")
    DIY bins created with wooden pallets or scrap lumber
- the number of initial food scrap contributors you can accommodate with your chosen bin system and seasonal decomposition time-frames (i.e., compost capacity)
- if desired, the ability to expand the size or number of bins over time to increase capacity or number of food scrap contributor

5. APPROVAL: Can you gain co-op Board approval and support?

- ability to create a compost project proposal and site plan that articulates its goals for co-op board approval and support (see *Resources* for a sample proposals)
- willing to take a constructive approach toward common fears or roadblocks often voiced by co-op boards and residents (i.e., odors, rodents, NIMBY, volunteer burnout, project sustainability)
- prepared to collaborate with building management, staff, and shareholders to gain Board (and/or building management) final approval and on-going support

JACKSON HEIGHTS CASE STUDIES

The five co-op compost site case studies first appear as an overview in a simple grid format, followed by separate case studies from the oldest to newest sites. These case studies highlight how five different co-ops have successfully implemented their composting sites. You will find similar and different approaches taken, based on a variety of factors at each site, as no one size fits all. Following are 11 criteria used for the grid format and more detailed case studies:

CASE STUDY SITES

Dunolly Gardens

The Towers

The Madison

The Griswold

The Berkeley

CASE STUDY CRITERIA

SITE: location and year started

VOLUNTEERS: volunteers who handle operations, membership, and communications

SYSTEMS: bin types and capacity (number of food scrap contributors)

BUDGET: start-up costs and on-going supplies and tools

APPROVAL: board or building management approval process and support

ACCESS: membership criteria and site access

SOURCES: compost browns (leaves, sawdust, newspaper)

USES: finished compost utilization (gardens, street tree beds, etc.)

RECORDS: documentation, communications, and site signage

PARTNERS: other co-op composters, community compost sites and city organizations

CHALLENGES: common obstacles to overcome

Site + Year Started	Dunolly Gardens (2010)	The Towers (2010)	The Madison (2011)	The Griswold (2019)	The Berkeley (2020)
Coordinators	Ashley Cruce: ashleycruce1@gmail.com	Kirsten Magnani: kirstmagnani@gmail.com	Michael Parrella: parrella00@gmail.com	Lisa Jarnot: ljarnot@protonmail.ch	Doug Mestanza: dougmestanza@yahoo.com
Volunteers	2 Co-Coordinators, plus members assist with compost and general garden tasks	1 Coordinator, 4 Co-Coordinators & gardeners assist with compost tasks	1-3 volunteers, working as part of garden committee	1 Coordinator	Each household acts as a primary monitor on a 2 week rotating basis
System	3 Earth Machine Bins [plastic with rodent guards]	1 3-bin Compost System [wooden with hardware cloth]	1 Garden Gourmet [plastic] and 1 DIY Bin [wood pallet]	4 Eco Master Compost Bins [plastic]	1 Jora Compost Tumbler [metal]
Approval	Garden committee reps presented proposal to Board and got approval	Compost project group got garden committee approval first, then got final approval from Board	Garden committee requested and got approval from Board	Former Co-Coordinator presented to the Board (as a board member and gardening committee leader) and got Board approval	Applied to the Board as a club, and got Board approval with specific restrictions and obligations
Access	Members-only: 15 active households (approx. 40 individuals); bins have hasp-locks and padlocks on lids to deter unauthorized access	Open to entire co-op (currently 50 individuals active)	Open to entire co-op (currently 6 households active)	1/3 of 80 co-op units active (approx. 25 -30 households)	Members-only: 9 active households (approx. 18 individuals); has sesame padlocks on the bin
Browns	Collect leaves every fall, plus donations of wood shavings from QBG Compost and sawdust donated from a local source (Hudson Scenic Studio)	Collect leaves every fall; store them in Geobins and sawdust donated from a local source (Hudson Scenic Studio)	Collect leaves and/or use shredded newsprint	Collect leaves every fall, and sometimes use newspaper if necessary	Sawdust donated from a local source (Hudson Scenic Studio) or purchase woodshavings (pet brand)
Uses	Perennials, trees, and children's garden on property, plus street tree beds	Adopt-a-gardens, children's garden and project areas on property	Co-op's garden beds	Ornamental and vegetable garden, and residents use it to fertilize house plants	All the compost is used internally by the garden committee on property
Budget	Garden committee has provided all funds for compost site through its annual fundraisers (for bins, aerator, and garden equipment/supplies)	Tenant donations, funding from the garden committee and the Board; 3-bin was built in-house	Garden Gourmet bin was $50; $40 for miscellaneous hardware to fabricate wood pallet compost bin; and compost crank approx. $45	Spent $200 total for 4 bins (QBG Compost) and a compost crank/aerator tool from the garden committee's funds	Each founding member contributed $115 for start-up costs; new members pay $50 and a $25 annual membership fee per household
Records	Google spreadsheet with members' info, records of bin rotations and volunteer hours; have a Google email group	Created Google spreadsheet; emails inform members of all necessary info	None	None	Slack group participation is mandatory
Partners	QBG Compost Project has provided technical support and resources since 2010; affiliated with other JH co-op composters	Demo site for the QBG Compost Project and affiliated with other JH co-op composters	None	None	Hudson Scenic Studio
Challenges	Limited capacity with 3 bins; requires close observation due to proximity to residents' windows; Past issues: soldier fly larvae overgrowth, aesthetic complaints from Management.	Getting help to manage entire project. Bins aren't locked; one member occasionally adds to wrong bin. Past issue: complaints for initial bin location, issue was resolved.	Limited capacity only allows for a fraction of households to participate, occasional rat interlopers; keeping garbage out of bins is a perpetual challenge.	Fruit flies in the summer; since our bins are are plastic and used by many households, we need to upgrade to something more sturdy.	Excess moisture from the Tumbler was puddling on the concrete slab and creating an odor; addressed it by using more sawdust.

DUNOLLY GARDENS

6 buildings, 78th and 79th Sts. and 34th and 35th Aves.
Ashley Cruce (ashleycruce1@gmail.com)

SITE

Near basement ramp of 34-20 79th St. building. Started in 2010.

VOLUNTEERS

Dunolly composters are active garden committee members (ideally), and they help with the site's compost tasks. However, the lion-share is done by the two Compost Co-Coordinators. Dunolly composters must complete an orientation session with a Compost Co-Coordinator before becoming members. We go over Compost 101 basics (using DSNY tip-sheets), give a demo at the bins, and give out our Info Sheet with padlock codes. In January 2021, we started a requirement that members volunteer for at least one work session of the garden committee and/or specific compost tasks (e.g. emptying bin/sifting, spreading finished compost, leaf collection, re-filling browns bin).

SYSTEMS

Three Earth Machine bins with 15 households [approx. 33 individuals] in our compost group currently. Grew from one to two Earth Machines in the first five years, then increased to three bins in 2017.

BUDGET

The Dunolly garden committee has been holding fundraisers for many years (annual flea market and fall garden party). Therefore, we had funds to purchase compost bins and other supplies (i.e.,compost aerator and browns bin). We are able to use the garden committee's gardening equipment (i.e., shovels, wheelbarrows, bags), and the garden room (for browns storage) for our operations. We purchased two of our Earth Machine bins at cost ($65 plus $20 for rodent guard) at QBG Compost, and one was donated to us by a member. The hasp locks, padlocks, and metal letter stickers are all from local hardware stores.

APPROVAL

Dunolly's garden committee (established in 1997) approached the Dunolly co-op Board in April 2010 to propose starting a composting program with two bins. We had technical support from the NYC Compost Project (QBG), which gave recommendations on bin type (Earth Machine with rodent guard), how to limit access (i.e., using a hasp and padlock), and overall best practices. Collaboration with Dunolly's garden committee has been vital for our compost efforts since the beginning, especially since we do our own fundraising and many garden committee members have also been supportive board members.

ACCESS

The site is hidden by landscaping (aka "the compost jungle") to obscure it from view. It has a mulched path and can be accessed by members anytime, but preferably during daylight hours (Monday-Sunday). Since the compost site is under residents' windows, we ask members to be sensitive to the time of day they drop off food scraps. We use interchangeable lids with letters A, B, and C (metal stickers) to indicate which bin is Active/Accepting Scraps ("A"), and has the specific padlock for the Active bin. We also move the "Active Bin" sign and place the browns bin next to it. B and C bins are no longer accepting new food scraps and are in later stages of decomposition.

DUNOLLY GARDENS cont.

SOURCES

For many years, we collected some of our property's fall leaves (oak and maple trees), and then mowed the dry leaves in the driveway in order to shred them (and store bags in our garden room); however, we had instances of damaging the co-op's mowers so we discontinued this. The garden committee still does an annual fall leaf crunch/collection, and we keep many bags of unshredded leaves for our browns. The shredded leaves help to quicken decomposition, so it's really ideal. In 2019, we started getting sawdust for our browns from the NYC Compost Project at QBG. Sawdust has a higher carbon content (than leaves) that helps with decomposition. It helps regulate humidity and moisture levels in the summer months (when we see more black soldier fly larvae).

Currently, for our browns we use a combination of sawdust and shredded leaves, and provide it in a browns bin next to the active bin (with lid to keep it dry). The Co-Coordinators are responsible for keeping the browns bin full at all times. We have considered buying a leaf shredder (electric-powered), but are concerned about the noise issues for residents. In the past, we also asked Urban Arborists, our tree work contractor, for wood chips after they completed our annual pruning, but used it for mulch on beds, not compost browns. Having a FREE browns source and having enough to get you through the entire season is very important. In lean times, we used shredded newspapers, but this is time/labor intensive!

USES

The Dunolly garden committee happily uses all of our finished compost on our property's perennial beds and trees, our children's garden (raised beds), and our block's street tree beds (along with free Christmas mulch from the annual DSNY Holiday Mulchfest). The two Dunolly Compost Co-Coordinators are responsible for emptying bins and sifting the finished compost (with volunteer assistance if possible). We use a wheelbarrow and heavy duty gloves to sift and remove unwanted bits by hand: 1) fruit pits of avocado, mango, peach, etc. that can be put back into the active bin and 2) trash: fruit/vegetable stickers, staples, rubber bands, corks, plastic, and random items (peeler, ring, etc.). We love to get members to assist with this task, but it often falls to the Co-Coordinators and can be last minute based on how fast the Active bin fills up. Our sifting process usually takes about 45-60 minutes for two people to empty one bin. If we cannot use the finished compost immediately, we store it in two 2-wheeled carts and cover for future use (at the site). We have not used screens or other sifting tables devices, but would be open to this in future.

RECORDS

The two Compost Co-Coordinators keep a Google spreadsheet with Dunolly compost members' names/information, required volunteer session, and a wait-list. We also keep records in this Google spreadsheet of the on-going compost operations, including: 1) when the Active bin is opened or closed, 2) when a bin is emptied and sifted, and 3) whether finished compost is stored or used in the garden. We can track the time of decomposition and how quickly our members are filling up a bin this way. We have a Dunolly composters' Google group for email communications, as well as a Dunolly garden committee Google group.

DUNOLLY GARDENS cont.

PARTNERS

We have been affiliated with the NYC Compost Project hosted by QBG for many years, and get an annual site visit and technical support/supplies (i.e. free sawdust/wood shavings). For several years, we have been one of the featured sites on their Master Composter Certificate class's annual visit to Jackson Heights. As a MC, Ashley collaborates with other composters and compost sites in Jackson Heights: St. Mark's FarmSpot CSA, The Towers, JHSCRAPS, Veggie Nuggets Green Team (affiliated with The Renaissance Charter School), other coop composters, as well as PS69Q and PS92Q GreenTeams' School-based Compost Sites.

CHALLENGES

Overall, it works smoothly, but as with other all-volunteer projects there are some challenges. The bulk of the workload falls on the two Compost Co-Coordinators, and not enough active members assist with on-going compost tasks. We have a limited ability to increase capacity through more bins since we are residential and new bins would be adjacent to more residents' windows.

In terms of co-op management, we had a former Property Manager who did not like seeing the bins (near his office entrance) "because it looked like trash cans," and he blamed a fly issue on the bins—despite the fact that every other basement ramp drain on the property also had flies. The current Property Manager is fine with it, but we do monitor it closely.

That said, we have had occasional fruit fly issues due to excessive amounts of tropical fruit in summer months (i.e., bananas, avocados, mangoes, pineapples). We ask members to freeze tropical fruit scraps since fruit fly larvae live in the peels, but can be killed if frozen. One odd, rare occurrence that has since been solved, was black soldier fly larvae literally marching in a line from a compost bin into our nearby basement during especially hot, humid, rainy conditions. Normally, they are desirable decomposers in active compost bins. But, since they were entering the basement, QBG Compost advised us to try sawdust as browns (due to higher carbon content) and that has worked.

DUNOLLY GARDENS cont.

DUNOLLY GARDENS SITE 2021

3 Earth Machine bins, browns bin and cart with finished compost

Location: by basement ramp, next to Management and Supers' offices with added landscaping to obscure site

Compost bins hidden by landscaping

THE TOWERS

8 buildings, 80th and 81st Sts. and 34th Ave.
Kirsten Magnani (kirstmagnani@gmail.com)

SITE

Behind the 33-52 81st St. building. Started in 2010.

VOLUNTEERS

One Coordinator and four Co-Coordinators. We currently have five serious composter/gardeners who help maintain the bin and browns.

SYSTEMS

Currently, one Vancouver 3-bin System (wooden with hardware cloth), with a capacity of approximately 50 shareholders (built in 2017). The Towers compost project has evolved over the past 11 years as participation from shareholders grew. We started small and didn't advertise, beginning with one Earth Machine bin for less than 10 households; then two Earth Machine bins with capacity of around 20 households. Later we added a large-size Joraform tumbler with over 30 households. The pros and cons of each system are described below.

Earth Machine Bins

First System: One Earth Machine bin and one leaf mulcher, less than 10 participating households. The goal was to have dedicated, knowledgeable participants who would compost correctly and help with the project's logistics. The number of participants gradually grew as people heard by word of mouth. A year later we added a second Earth Machine bin. Leaves were collected from our garden. The bins were locked and labeled: "open" and "closed". New participants were given a Compost 101 demonstration, DSNY tip-sheets and the Earth Machine Home Composting Handbook, and contact information for questions. We encouraged shareholders to contact Kirsten Magnani for any questions before adding to the bin, which many have done, thus avoiding issues.

Joraform Tumbler

The Joraform works on specific criteria: uses wood pellets as browns, food must be chopped small, volume cannot reach maximum capacity, and moisture control is finicky. We had issues at every level. We did use wood pellets but it was an extra step to source them and the moisture balance was never correct; shavings were added by each shareholder, resulting in irregular oversight. This would work if one person were in charge of checking it every few days but this was not how our community compost was run. Plus we had a fantastic source of leaves in our backyard that couldn't be utilized. We tried using leaves as browns in the Joraform, but it didn't work. No matter how many times we asked people to chop their food, there were always some who didn't. Also, when full the tumbler became so heavy it took considerable strength to turn it.

Vancouver 3-bin System

In 2017, we sold the Joraform to help fund the 3-bin system. The garden committee provided the remaining funding, and shareholders built the structure. The design is an adapted Vancouver 3-bin design [see Resources for blueprint links]. Dimensions are 10' long, 2.5′ high, and 3' deep. This worked better for the site. Shareholder participation has increased since to 40-50 people. One aspect we forgot to account for in the planning was to make sure the shareholder who lived above the compost bin approved it being there. Since the site was visible from the street, this shareholder was concerned someone could climb onto the compost bin and get into their first floor apartment. We moved the bin to a site not visible from the street, in between two buildings and got approval from all shareholders who overlooked it.

THE TOWERS cont.

BUDGET

The Towers garden committee paid for the initial Earth Machines, leaf mulcher and aeration tool. The Joraform was paid for by donations from shareholders. Money we received from selling the Joraform went towards the cedar planks for the 3-bin system and the Board and garden committee provided the remainder. Tools currently used: two cranks and a pitchfork for aerating, a compost thermometer, and shovel. We use two wire leaf mulchers and four Geobins to store leaves. A fifth Geobin is used for maturing compost during the final stage.

APPROVAL

The first proposal with the Earth Machines was based on the compost project at Celtic Park, a co-op with similar conditions/parameters as the Towers. The Towers co-op considered this as an experiment that which had to be safely managed, being mindful of rodents and other potential hazards. As the project grew in capacity, the logistics were discussed and amended by the garden committee, so a new proposal would be created and presented to the Board. Please note, approval from shareholders directly impacted by the location of the compost bin is essential.

ACCESS

Due to the success of the Towers' compost project, the Board required the current 3-bin system to be accessible to all shareholders, in keeping with the values of a co-op. Over time having the ability to compost locally has become an important asset to the life of the Towers co-op community. Shareholders are given an orientation with a Co-Coordinator to learn the basics of Compost 101. We have not required volunteer obligation, but may in the future. Shareholders generally are happy to be given small compost tasks such as aerating compost for 3 weeks while it's maturing. The current 3-bin is well hidden with landscaping. Currently all three bins are labeled A, B, and C. A for Active and is painted green, B for In Between, is the color purple, C is red for Closed. The bins are technically unlocked, and we put rocks on top of the lids to indicate the particular bin is inactive. We send emails via the co-op and garden committee list when the active bin changes or any issues need addressing.

SOURCES

We have a valuable source of leaves from the trees in the Towers co-op garden. Collecting and storing leaves is a work in progress. Currently we have a landscaping company that blows our leaves into piles only to remove most of them, but we are hoping to change this. As the compost project has grown, more browns are necessary. We started with two wire leaf munchers and in 2021 we bought four Geobins to store leaves. Until 2021, we always ran out of leaves by September and supplemented with wood shavings and shredded paper. We purchased wood shavings from Triple Star Horse Feed, at $8 for a huge bag. In 2021 shareholders realized the importance of leaves and now participate in leaf collection and storage. Geobins are located discreetly throughout the entire site.

USES

All finished compost is used in the Towers' co-op garden. A compost giveaway is announced via the co-op Google group email. Compost is divided evenly among Towers' gardeners who request it.

THE TOWERS cont.

RECORDS

Until 2021, records were kept on paper...so 20th century! Now the two Compost Co-Coordinators keep a Google spreadsheet that is based on the Dunolly composter spreadsheet. We include the names and contact information of Towers' shareholders who compost, as well as ongoing compost operations such as when the Active bin is opened or closed, and when a bin is emptied. We also track the time of decomposition and how quickly the bins are filling up, keep a to-do list and another list of volunteers for tasks. All communications are through the co-op and garden committee email list. Emails are written by the Co-Coordinators and usually contain images such as annotated photographs for visual impact.

PARTNERS

We have been affiliated with the NYC Compost Project hosted by QBG for many years and have been one of the featured sites on their Master Composter Certificate course's annual visit to Jackson Heights. As a Master Composter, Kirsten collaborates with other composters and compost sites in Jackson Heights: St. Mark's FarmSpot CSA, JHSCRAPS, Dunolly, and The Berkeley.

CHALLENGES

Overall the project runs smoothly. We did have three incidents of a shareholder adding a plastic bag of scraps into a “closed” bin. "This was addressed via an email with photos showing that this was unacceptable. Luckily it has not occurred again. Another small issue is that, despite instructions that food scraps be chopped into smaller pieces, it is often added whole. We also see the occasional produce sticker, rubber band and twist tie. We have had the occasional minor unbalanced insect issues. Usually the new active bin has an over population of flies for a short time at the beginning but they go away once the bin starts cooking. We also once had an overpopulation of water bugs in the active bin. We added fine sawdust to get it really hot and to balance the moisture. The problem resolved itself. Also corks don’t decompose, so we now have a separate container at the compost site and donate them to ReCork, which re-purposes them.

THE TOWERS cont.

THE TOWERS SITE 2022

Active bin with "A" label

3-bin system with landscaping to obscure site and black Geobin used for leaves/browns or alternately for storing compost during curing stage

3-bin system next to building

THE MADISON

1 building, 35-02 88th St. and 35th Ave.
Michael Parrella (parrella00@gmail.com)

SITE

Behind building, near 88th St. sidewalk and the building's service entrance. Started in 2011.

VOLUNTEERS

Members of the garden committee, as available.

SYSTEMS

1 Garden Gourmet and 1 DIY bin made with wooden pallets used by a half-dozen households. DIY bin was made from wooden pallets and non-corroding/non-leaching stainless steel hardware. The planks from the pallets that form the side walls of the bin are spaced about ¾" apart to allow for ventilation. The planks on the face of the bin are able to slide up and out of the way for easy emptying. Both compost bins now sit on brick footings elevating them off the ground.

BUDGET

The original Garden Gourmet bin was approximately $50 (10 years ago), screws and hinges for the wood pallet bin did not exceed $40, and the shipping pallets and scrap lumber were found at no cost. The stainless steel compost crank/auger was approx. $45.

APPROVAL

An intrepid resident (who has since moved out of the city) proposed the compost bin concept to the Board and received funding to purchase the bin. Volunteers at the Madison created a handbook five years ago to pull several building documents and policies into a single resource for residents, including guidelines for how residents can compost. In the Fall of 2020, volunteers proposed a second compost bin to the Board (see *Resources* for proposal concept) In December 2020 with Board approval, volunteers built a second, larger wooden compost bin.

ACCESS

While not all residents of the 42-unit co-op participate in the composting effort, all are eligible. For the roughly half-dozen households who choose to, the Madison asks that compost be limited to vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, and loose tea to minimize odors (no plastic produce stickers please!). Unlike larger commercial composting projects, no meat, dairy, or oils of any kind can be added to the bin to prevent urban pests. Occasionally the bin fills up and composting needs to pause while the compost cooks down or until the bin can be emptied into nearby planting beds, and residents are notified via email. The compost bin is not locked and despite labeling, composters sometimes need to pull non-compostable garbage or rodent-attracting items (e.g. a dozen hard-boiled Easter eggs) out of the bin.

SOURCES

The co-op asks that residents add a few handfuls of shredded newspaper or dry leaves to the bin when adding vegetable scraps to maintain a good carbon to nitrogen ratio. Usually these browns are provided by the residents although last year the Madison used oak leaves that had been gathered into a plastic recycling bag and kept adjacent to the bin.

USES

The compost bin is emptied annually in the spring by volunteers on the garden committee and its contents are spread around the various planting beds on the property when ready.

THE MADISON cont.

RECORDS

The instructions for what can be added to the bin are incorporated into the co-op's handbook. There is an email chain among active and prospective compost contributors where compost volunteers can notify users which bin is active and provide gentle reminders about what can and cannot be added to the bin.

PARTNERS

To date, the Madison has evolved its composting activity without formal affiliations with other organizations, though the Madison is pleased to be part of the broader initiative of bottom-up resident composting efforts within the borough and the city.

CHALLENGES

In February 2020, for the first time in over 10 years, a family of rats took up residence beneath the compost bin. Volunteers emptied the bin, dispersed the rats and returned the bin to use by placing it atop a layer of loose bricks. A rare event in the composting history of the co-op, and so far, there have been no further issues.

THE MADISON cont.

THE MADISON SITE 2022

Commercially available Garden Gourmet plastic compost bin (right) and DIY wooden compost bin made from recycled shipping pallets (left).

Note: both compost bins sit on brick foundations.

DIY compost bin has removable slats at face to allow gardeners to access compost for use in planting beds

DIY compost bin detail (top-down view)

THE GRISWOLD

1 building, 86-10 34th Ave.
Lisa Jarnot (ljarnot@protonmail.ch)

SITE

Rear of building at 86-10 34th Ave. Started in 2019.

VOLUNTEERS

The Griswold has just one Compost Coordinator, but everyone who uses the bins has now been through a training session and all share in the maintenance. Occasionally the garden committee (about six people) also steps in to spread finished compost around the garden.

SYSTEMS

Six bins total: four Eco Master bins by Graf and two Soil Savers in rear garden behind the building (bins for the east side of building and bins for west side.) The four Eco Master bins by Graf (120gal each) were purchased at the Queens Botanical Garden, and the two Soil Savers were purchased online.

BUDGET

We spent $200 total for the first four bins and a Compost Crank/aerator tool from the garden committee's funds. The two new bins cost about $70 each online.

APPROVAL

Lisa first pitched composting to the Board in 2016 and they were ambivalent. Ian proposed it in 2019 as a Board member/gardening committee leader and it passed.

ACCESS

At this point we have at least ⅓ of our 80 units using them, approx. 25-30 households. The Eco Master was a little bit flimsy so we added two Soil Saver bins, which have locking lids. It is open to anyone in the building who is interested. We used to have a lock on the bins, but it really wasn't necessary.

SOURCES

We originally used leaves that we gathered in the fall, and sometimes newspapers if we ran out of leaves. Now we purchase sawdust ($10 per large bag) at a wood scrap recycling business on Northern Blvd. We've found that the sawdust is better at reducing odors and fruit flies.

USES

We use the compost to fertilize the ornamental and vegetable garden and residents use it to fertilize house plants. We generate a lot of compost. We now have a separate pile of finished compost that we use around the garden.

RECORDS

No record keeping. Signage at site says which bin is active and which bin is closed/cooking.

PARTNERS

No partners, but Duke Yun (formerly at the QBG Compost Project) was really helpful. See *Resources* for QBG Compost staff.

CHALLENGES

I definitely recommend that first-time composters think of the structural integrity of the bin and choose bins with sturdy materials. We occasionally have mice pop in and out of the bins, but they don't stick around because we are always cranking the bins to aerate them.

THE GRISWOLD cont.

THE GRISWOLD SITE 2022

Eco Master Compost bins and browns bin

Active Compost Bin

THE BERKELEY

3 buildings, 78th and 77th Sts. and 35th Ave.
Doug Mestanza (dougmestanza@yahoo.com)

SITE

In a basement-level breezeway of the 35-25 77th St. building accessed through the garden entrances or from the basement. Started in summer 2020.

VOLUNTEERS

Each member household (total of 9, approx. 18 people) acts as a primary monitor on a 2-week rotating basis.

SYSTEMS

One Joraform Tumbler, with two compartments, holding 35 gallons each. One compartment fills up in about the time it takes the other to decompose and be ready to harvest. Nine households appears to be our limit for this system. We started with seven households with an average of about 14 people.

BUDGET

Each of the founding members contributed $115 to cover the start-up costs. As members leave, each new member pays $50 when joining. We also decided on a $25 annual membership fee for a household to help cover the additional costs of supplies.

APPROVAL

We applied to the Board as a club, open to co-op residents, but with limited membership. There's some background to this. The Berkeley had outdoor composting a number of years ago. It worked fairly well, however there were several difficulties: 1) the security of the bins (i.e., broken lids, useless locks, trash and other unwanted deposits from uninitiated residents); 2) maintaining and harvesting the compost; 3) not enough participants; and 4) bad design of the bins. That previous experiment ended with the neighborhood rat infestation of 2016. So our application had to be based on using an enclosed tumbler with limited access and a well-organized plan of maintenance. But we also had to apply as an organization with clear protocols for membership and lines of communication with the Board. Our application was accepted on the condition that the compost we produce was reserved for use by the co-op.

ACCESS

Only members of the composting group are allowed to contribute food scraps into the tumbler. There are sesame padlocks on each of the two chambers and only members have the combination. Membership is open to all co-op residents based on availability of slots. Potential members join our Slack group and do a walk-through with a monitoring member to make sure they know how to do it.

SOURCES

We have fine sawdust that is donated from a carpentry shop affiliated with Hudson Scenic Studio [see *Resources*]. We also have oak tree filings from a friend who chops down trees for a living. We also use Feline Pine cat litter as well as rabbit bedding wood shavings to soak up the moisture that drips from the Joraform Tumbler.

USES

When harvesting finished compost, at first we used a DIY metal frame screen as a sifter (see photo below). We have upgraded from the frame screen sifter that some people found difficult to use to a Rolling Garden Sifter with an easy crank handle ($150). We sift the contents to remove items that have not fully broken down and to catch an assortment of stickers, rubber bands, plastic and other things that accidentally made it in the tumbler.

THE BERKELEY cont.

The building's co-op Board has mandated that all the finished compost must be used internally by the garden committee; however, at first they did not want any composting on the property. The garden committee and the compost committee are two stand-alone committees with little to no interaction with each other except for handing over the compost once it's made. However, once the garden committee started using our finished compost, we received several messages of praise and they were very impressed with the quality of our compost.

RECORDS

Each compartment has a tag on it that reads "cooking" or "active." There is also a guideline for what is and what is not to be contributed attached to the Tumbler. Each contributing household has to act as an official monitor for two weeks at a time every few months, to check the compartments and supervise harvesting. We also created a Slack group; it is a requirement to be active on the Slack group so that everybody understands what's happening. One of our Board members is also in the Slack group to be kept up to date.

PARTNERS

We think of the sources that donate our browns' materials as partners (i.e., Hudson Scenic Studio).

CHALLENGES

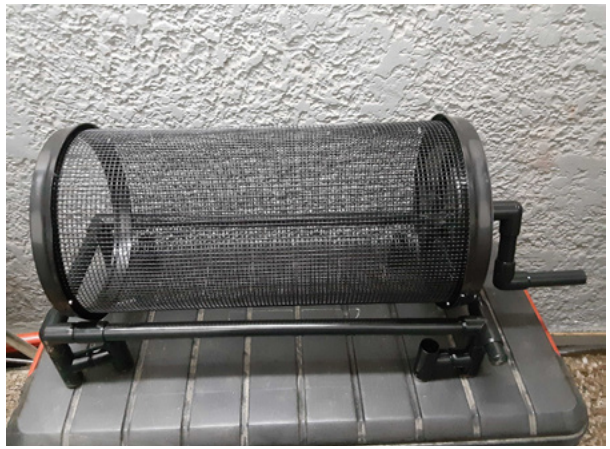
Excess moisture leaking from the tumbler was puddling on the concrete slab underneath and creating an odor. Dealing with this has been an ongoing struggle. We've discovered that tumblers are in fact a very high maintenance compost system. Food scraps need to be cut as small as possible to quickly and efficiently break down in the tumbler. We've also discovered that even though we are a relatively small group there seem to be at least one if not more persons putting relatively large pieces of scraps, such as corn cobs and other large things into the tumbler. We are also finding more pieces of plastic and stickers than expected with such an intimate group.

THE BERKELEY cont.

THE BERKELEY'S SITE 2022

Joraform Compost Tumbler

DIY sifting frame/screen for harvesting finished compost



Rolling garden sifter for harvesting finished compost

THE BERKELEY cont.

THE BERKELEY BROWNS

Sawdust is donated by carpentry shop affiliated with Hudson Scenic Studio; also shared with other coop compost sites

Kaytee Pet Brand wood shavings

Arm & Hammer FelinePine 100% Natural Pine

CO-OP COMMUNITY COMPOSTING RESOURCES

1. Sample Board Proposals: The Berkeley, The Towers, and The Madison: Accessible via Google Drive here.
    - The Berkeley's 2-page Proposal for Board Approval to Purchase Compost Tumbler
    - The Towers' First Compost Project Proposal for Board Approval
    - The Towers' Second Compost Proposal for Board Approval
    - The Madison's 2nd Compost Bin Proposal for Board Approval
2. Sample New Members' Orientation Hand-out: Dunolly Gardens: Accessible via Google Drive here.
3. Sample Membership and Operations Spreadsheets: Dunolly Gardens
4. Links to New York City, New York State, National, and General Composting Resources
5. Other Helpful Articles and Books on Composting

SAMPLE MEMBERSHIP AND OPERATIONS SPREADSHEETS

MEMBERSHIP SPREADSHEET EXAMPLE

Name(s)	HH Size (# of people)	Food Scrap Drop-off Frequency	Email	Date Added	Dunolly Bldg #	2021 Volunteer Session Completed
Ashley Cruce and spouse	2	Weekly	ashleycruce1@gmail.com	2012	2	Yes (Co-Coord.)

OPERATIONS SPREADSHEET EXAMPLE

2021 Compost Bins Rotation and Tasks by Co-Coord. and Vols	Volunteers	Notes
11/29/21 sifted and emptied Bin C [by ramp railing]; spread finished compost	Sarah and Ashley	Spread finished compost on interior trees (four oaks, one pine, and two Norway maples) at the Northern end of the property.
12/1/21 Closed current A Bin, opened bin emptied by Ashley and Sarah on 11/29 as new A bin [by ramp railing]	Ashley	

COMMUNITY COMPOSTING RESOURCES

QUEENS-BASED NYC PROJECTS

NYC Compost Project hosted by
Queens Botanical Garden:

https://queensbotanical.org/farmandcompost

NYCCP QBG Compost staff can be reached at: compost@queensbotanical.org.

- Strongly recommend signing up for their monthly e-newsletter. Equipment sales (compost bins, compost cranks) have been temporarily suspended during COVID, but they hope to bring this back in near future.

NYC Compost Project hosted by BigReuse:

Email: compost@bigreuse.org
https://www.bigreuse.org/service/compost/

Queens Solid Waste Advisory Board (QSWAB):

https://queensswab.nyc/

QCP Compost Taskforce

https://www.queensclimateproject.org/initiatives

FREE SAWDUST for Compost Browns
donated by Hudson Scenic Studios

Contact Doug Mestanza (Co-op Composter at The Berkeley): dougmestanza@yahoo.com

HUDSON SCENIC STUDIO THEATRICAL ASSOCIATES

QUEENS-BASED NYC PROJECTS

JHSCRAPS Community Compost Site

Drop-off: 11am-1pm every Saturday (year-round)
Location: At 69th St. near 35th Ave.
Jackson Heights 11372
Email: JHSCRAPS@jhbg.org
https://www.jhbg.org/jh-scraps-2/

DSNY/NYC COMPOST PROJECT

Outdoor Composting Guide (available in eleven different languages), Tip Sheets, and Master Composter Manual:

https://www.makecompost.nyc/

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/docs/nyc-master-composter-manual-mcm.pdf

NYS COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Cornell Waste Management Institute

http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/smallscale.html

NYC COMPOST ADVOCACY

(for City-wide/Large-scale Organics Collection)
#SaveOurCompost: Lobbying NYC Mayor and City Councilmembers

https://linktr.ee/saveourcompostnyc/

NATIONAL COMMUNITY COMPOSTING RESOURCES

US Composting Council

www.compostingcouncil.org

Compost Foundation's International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW)

https://www.compostfoundation.org/ICAW/ICAW-Home

COMMUNITY COMPOSTING RESOURCES CONT.

INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL SELF-RELIANCE COMMUNITY COMPOSTING RESOURCES

https://ilsr.org/composting/

https://ilsr.org/webinar-home-composting-may-2020/

Linda Bilsens Brolis and Brenda Platt (March 2019) ILSR's Neighborhood Soil Rebuilders Program. *Community Composting Done Right: A Guide to Best Management Practices.* https://ilsr.org/composting-bmp-guide/

4-page Summary of ILSR's Community Composting Done Right: https://cdn.ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Compost-BMP-Summary.pdf

Brenda Platt (ILSR) and James McSweeney and Jenn Davis (Highfields Center for Composting) (April 2014). *Growing Local Fertility: A Guide to Community Composting.* Hardwick, VT. https://ilsr.org/size-matters-report-shows-small-scale-community-based-composting/

Sophia Hosain, Clarissa Libertelli, and Brenda Platt (2022). *Oh Rats! How to Avoid Rodents at Community Composting Sites.* https://cdn.ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Oh-Rats-How-to-Avoid-Rodents-at-Community-Composting-Sites-2.pdf

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

For blueprints and vendors providing various types of compost bins:

Blueprint 3-bin compost system "Oregon Metro": LINK

Blueprint 3-bin compost system Blue Heron Park Reiser: LINK

Blueprint 3-bin compost system DSNY/LESEC: LINK

Various compost bins at Home Depot: LINK

Earth Machine compost bins [recently difficult to get]: LINK

Joraform Compost Tumbler: LINK

Earth Machine Guidebook: LINK

For blueprints and vendors for compost sifters and crank tools:

DIY Trommel Compost Sifters: LINK

DIY Trommel Screen: LINK

Rolling Compost Sifter: LINK

Compost Cranks: LINK

ARTICLES AND BOOKS ON COMPOSTING

https://www.foodcycler.com/post/dirty-dozen-12-top-composting-methods-pros-cons-costs

David Buckel (May 2017) *"Guidelines for Urban Community Composting--Part A: Getting Past Odors and Rats"* in BioCycle Magazine.

https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Guidelines-for-Urban-Community-Composting.pdf

David Buckel (Nov. 2013) *"Commentary: Why Big And Small Organics Recyclers Need Each Other"* in BioCycle Magazine.

https://www.biocycle.net/commentary-why-big-and-small-organics-recyclers-need-each-other/

Cromwell, Cathy (2010). *Composting for Dummies.* Wiley: Hoboken, NJ.

Davies, Stephanie (2011). *Composting Inside & Out: 14 Methods to Fit Your Lifestyle.* Betterway Home: Cincinnati, OH.

Flowerdew, Bob (2012). *Composting.* Skyhorse Publishers: New York, NY.

Louie, Rebecca (2015). *Compost City: Practical Composting Know-How for Small-Space Living.* Roost Books: Boston, MA.

Martin, Deborah L. and Gershuny, Grace (eds.) (1992). *The Rodale Book of Composting: Easy Methods for Every Gardener.* Rodale Press: Emmaus, PA.

Pears, Pauline (2020). *Organic Book of Compost: Easy and Natural Techniques to Feed Your Garden.* IMM Lifestyle Books: Mount Joy, PA.

Scott, Nicky (2007). *Composting: An Easy Household Guide.* Chelsea Green Pub. Co.: White River Junction, VT.