

## **Green Bin is a success: The facts about the program**

Toronto's Green Bin program is one of the most successful waste diversion programs on the continent and saves thousands of tonnes of organic material from going to landfill. The program is not perfect. And as the first program of its size anywhere, it has had to deal with many technological challenges.

Toronto's program was created to maximize convenience for residents which included being able to use plastic bags and to accept hard-to-process materials such as diapers. Other jurisdictions with different housing characteristics may not need to allow plastic bags but Toronto, with 500,000 multi-family homes, does. With this modification, Toronto has produced one of the highest rates of compost per household in Ontario.

Any plastic that goes into the system is removed as residue. This plastic residue was planned for, is accounted for and is included in our statistics as garbage, not as diversion. Toronto stands by its figure of 44% diversion in 2008. The City uses a standardized formula used by all Ontario municipalities to calculate waste diversion. This accounting method specifically removes residue and only reports material actually composted or recycled.

The disposal of plastic residue is the responsibility of our contractors. Our contracts specify that our residue must go to our own Green Lane landfill. It is only residue, however, that goes to landfill. There is no evidence anywhere that Toronto's Green Bin organic material goes directly to landfill or incineration.

With respect to our finished product, we have thousands of satisfied returning residents lining up every year to get compost for their lawns and gardens. Torontonians who place their yard clippings and leaf bags at the curb are getting a completely composted product back at Environment Days. It is an excellent soil amendment, a sustainable resource, and meets stringent Ministry of the Environment standards. However, one should not place plants in pure compost just as they should not place them in pure fertilizer. The City's compost is meant as a soil conditioner and should be mixed with soil at a ratio of 1 part compost to 4 parts soil. After more than a decade of giving our compost back to residents, the only complaint we have heard is that there is never enough.

The system that Toronto chose to process our green bin materials is different than that used by other, less urban municipalities. The City's own primary processing facility is functioning flawlessly and was built to remove the plastics in the system. This facility is also able to handle diapers. The plastic in diapers is removed as residue and fully accounted for but the remaining material is digested and composted.

The City is in the process of constructing new composting facilities that will result in two thirds of our organic materials being processed here in the City with our own state-of-the-art technology. The remaining third will be sent to processors who are currently expanding and improving their own systems. We are in a growth and bridging phase right now and expect to have our long term system operational over the next several years. In the interim, while two nearby municipalities are landfilling or incinerating the vast majority of their organics, we are proud that 100% of our organics are sent for the production of compost.

All of our external processors are fully permitted by the Ministry of the Environment and produce only, as a requirement of their operating permit, Class A unrestricted-use compost. These processors are also subject to frequent planned and random inspections by City staff and Ministry regulators. In addition, the City conducts regular audits of the organics processing system to ensure the integrity of the entire process.

Toronto residents have every reason to be proud of their city's Green Bin program and of their role in it. We encourage our citizens to continue to separate their organics and to know with confidence that, despite some minor growing pains, Toronto's Green Bin program is one of the most effective in North America.