

## Compost spreads into Cte St. Luc; More cities are instituting curbside pickup of household waste like coffee grounds, fish

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### Full text:

(From The Gazette, September 26, 2007) A story in Monday's paper said incorrectly that weekly compost collection in Cte St. Luc will occur less frequently during winter. In fact, compost pickup will continue on a weekly basis throughout the year.\*\*\*\*\*

Brown, black or blue?

That's the choice some Cte St. Luc residents will face from now on when taking out the trash as their city becomes the latest Quebec municipality to add compostable material to its curbside waste collection.

Last week, 500 single-family homes in parts of Districts 4 and 5 received new garbage containers for organic material as part of a pilot project: a 7.5-litre one for the kitchen and a 46.5-litre brown bin for the curb.

"If this is successful, within a year we'll expand it to the rest of single-family homes," said Steven Erdelyi, the city councillor behind the initiative.

Compost collection will begin tomorrow and continue weekly (less often in winter), with regular garbage collection reduced from twice to once a week.

Compostable material makes up almost half of all household waste and in Cte St. Luc will include everything from grass clippings and coffee grounds to bread, meat, fish and milk products. (For a full list, see [www.ecocsl.org](http://www.ecocsl.org).)

The city of Sherbrooke, meanwhile, rolled out its own \$3.5- million composting plan last week, expanding a pilot project that began five years ago across the entire city.

It aims to distribute 34,000 360-litre brown compost bins by December to all households of four units or less and extend the program to apartment buildings next year. The program will cost \$50 to \$60 a year per household to operate.

Decreasing landfill space and the province's fast approaching 2008 waste reduction targets, which expect cities to divert 60 per cent of waste from landfill, are driving more and more cities to institute composting programs.

At least 12 Quebec municipalities already have city-wide organic collection or pilot projects - including Victoriaville, Quebec City, Lachute, Rawdon, St. Hyacinthe, Sorel Tracy and les de la Madeleine.

Pointe Claire recently wrapped up a four-month pilot project that included 200 homes, and Laval has a limited curbside program that began in 1996 and now serves 6,000 households in Chomedey, Ste. Rose and Laval des

Rapides.

Montreal has no immediate compost plan in the works but is studying its options and hopes to touch on organic matter in the waste management plan due out this fall, said Alan DeSousa, executive committee member responsible for sustainable development.

There are several factors to consider - from what type of container to use in the kitchen (providing one, letting people choose their own, allowing or not allowing bags) and at the curbside (bins vary in size from 45 litres to 360 litres and type - aerated or not) to where to dispose of the material (city or privately run site); how to break it down (aerobic or anaerobic biological processes); and what to do with the end product.

In Cte St. Luc, residents received a two-to-four-month supply of special compostable bags with which to line their kitchen containers - although old newspapers and paper bags are also acceptable. The bags, which are made of corn starch and are 100- per-cent biodegradable, will be sold at Wal-Mart, Rona and other stores for

about 10 cents a bag.

"The biggest problem I'm concerned about is the bags," Erdelyi said. "Once people run out of the free samples, will they be willing to go buy them? We're hoping ... they do not use incorrect bags, which will cause problems for the composting."

Toronto, which has had a composting program since 2002, chose a different model, allowing people to line bins with regular plastic grocery bags and to compost diapers.

"We wanted to make participation as easy as possible," said Geoff Rathbone, general manager of solid waste for the city of Toronto. "Even though there are a few things we really don't want - like lobster shells - things that don't break down very well, we just say: 'Give it all to us.'"

Plastic increases costs, as it must be removed at the composting facility. Toronto spends about \$100 to \$130 per tonne to dispose of organic material, or about twice as much as on landfill, while Cte St. Luc will pay \$59 a tonne. Both had start-up costs of roughly \$25 per household for the distribution of containers and information materials.

The average household in the Toronto program, which includes 500,000 single family homes (including duplexes and triplexes), composts 375 kilograms of kitchen scraps and garden waste a year.

When it began collecting compost, Toronto reduced garbage collection from once a week to once every two weeks and saw recycling rates rise slightly, Rathbone said. The total percentage of waste diverted from landfill climbed from about 33 per cent to 58 per cent.

Ironically, some of that material is trucked to Lachute for composting because Ontario doesn't have enough facilities to process all that Toronto and other cities collect.

Cte St. Luc will ship its waste to a site in St. Basile le Grand on the South Shore run by GSI Environment, one of the largest companies providing compost services in Quebec.

There are about 40 such compost facilities in the province. Some are owned or run by cities, others by the private sector and still others by a combination of the two.

Many have been treating organic waste from the food, agriculture and pulp and paper industries for years, but are increasingly accepting residential waste even though it's more expensive to treat, said Susan Antler of the Composting Council of Canada, a non-profit organization made up of government and industry representatives.

Overall, Quebec composts about one million tonnes a year, she said, which puts it 200,000 tonnes behind New Brunswick, the national leader, but 300,000 tonnes ahead of Ontario.

Composting is still more expensive than landfilling. Compost facilities make their money from tipping fees, not the compost. But, Antler said, the industry has the potential to become profitable in the future.

"Composting isn't just the act of diverting organic residuals from landfill," Antler said. "Equally important is ... the kind of product you want to produce and the markets you want to go after. Compost is a very generic word, but there are different types of quality of compost."

Depending on the organic matter, compost, which takes about a year to create, has different applications. It can be used for landscaping, gardening, agriculture, erosion control and decontamination, she said. It also has the potential to earn cities greenhouse gas emission credits, since composting produces fewer emissions like methane and carbon dioxide than landfill.

The council advises cities to charge residents for compost rather than give it away, as Toronto and others do, to stress the value of the resource.

They also can't be afraid to let residents know when they're gumming up the process, said Antler, who has seen everything from cotton socks to jars of jam end up in the compost heap.

"It's not a slam dunk; it needs to be nurtured," she said. "You are making a big change in behaviour and you need to continue to reinforce it."

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**Illustration**

Colour Photo: TIM SNOW, THE GAZETTE / Volunteers gathered at Cte St. Luc pool this month to assemble composting kits, which have been distributed to homes. ;

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