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CSL CORNER

What we learned about organic waste collection

This year marks the fifth anniversary since Côte St. Luc launched a pilot program in 2007 for curbside collection of organic waste. We expanded the program in 2008 to all single-family homes and duplexes. Since then, we reduced the amount of garbage going to landfills by 38 percent. After five years, we are in a unique position to clear up misconceptions, highlight the benefits and look at the obstacles we have experienced.

What is organic waste?

Organic waste is any material from plant or animal sources, such as left-over food, soiled paper and garden waste. Instead of separating waste in just two ways (recycling and garbage), residents separate it three ways (recycling, garbage, and organic waste).

Misconception #1: Separating organic waste is difficult

Participating residents are diverting well over 50 percent of their organic waste away from landfills — an amazing accomplishment compared to the provincial average of 10 percent. When curbside recycling collection was launched more than 20 years ago, some feared residents would not participate because it was too complicated. Today, a generation has grown up with recycling and it is a normal part of life.

Misconception #2: Food waste sits in brown bins for weeks to 'compost'

Curbside collection of organic waste is not the same thing as home backyard composting. Residents simply put their organic waste in a brown bin and the city collects it every week — just like regular garbage. The difference is that the organic waste is brought to a facility where it is turned into compost.

Misconception #3: Organic waste collection is costly

Municipalities can get funding from a Quebec government program for cities doing innovative environmental projects. For instance, last year the Quebec program provided Côte St. Luc with more than \$315,000 — more than enough to cover the cost of the program for one year.

Obstacle #1: Compostable bags

When we introduced our program, we gave residents the choice of using certified compostable bags or paper bags. Recently, we received a directive from the Quebec ministry of the Environment to stop using these compostable bags. We will encourage our residents to use paper bags; however, we continue to believe that allowing compostable bags — especially at the launch of such a program — helps make it easier for people to participate.

Obstacle #2: Cracked bins

Due to a defect with the UV coating on the brown bins received from our supplier, some of these bins have cracked. We encourage residents to call the Public Works department at 514.485.6868 to order a free replacement bin.

By introducing curbside organic waste collection, Côte St. Luc has become a leader in waste collection. Our experience so far is that, despite a few obstacles, curbside organic waste collection is relatively easy to start, less costly than many believe and popular with residents.

To learn more or to watch videos about the program, visit ecoCSL.org.

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