



DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Earth Tub will turn food waste into fertile compost

A new composting system will reduce the amount of food waste the University leaves in landfills

BY ADAM CHERRY
NEWS REPORTER

The University took another step toward environmental responsibility on Friday with the addition of a new composting device intended to decrease the amount of food waste that ends up in the dump.

The University's acquisition of the Earth Tub, a commercial composting system that will allow waste to be processed more easily and quickly than by using conventional methods, ends a year-long quest for University Sustainability Coordinator Steve Mital.

"It's a great opportunity to close a loop," Mital said. "We have food waste that's produced on campus. We have an urban garden that needs compost delivered to it frequently."

In 2003, Mital and a team of students released a report that analyzed the waste produced by EMU Food Services in an Environmental Studies Service Learning Program project. They concluded that an Earth Tub was a good way to reduce the amount of food waste the EMU sent to landfills.

Food waste that enters a landfill does not decompose, according to the report. It decays, releasing carbon dioxide and methane, both of which are greenhouse gasses. Decaying materials can seep into water and land, causing further pollution.

According to the report, a five-day waste audit in winter 2003 found the EMU generated 9.67 cubic yards of food waste, 41 percent of which was deemed "potentially compostable."

University Housing will be the primary contributor to the composting program.

"To get anything going as far as composting is a good thing," said Tom Driscoll, food services director for University Housing.

The EMU will participate in the program as well.

"We don't generate a lot of wasted food (at the EMU)" due to food options and independent food vendors, said John Costello, food services director for the EMU. "We'd certainly be interested in participating as much as we could."

The University bought the Earth Tub for "less than \$1" from the Eugene 4J school district, and will spend \$1000-\$2000 on installation, Mital said.

Mital and Anne Donahue, a compost specialist for the City of Eugene, highlighted the benefits of the Earth Tub over regular composting methods.

"It guarantees that you can compost very quickly. (It's three weeks) from the time that you throw food waste in here to the time that you pull out compost ready to put on your garden, whereas a traditional compost pile can take months," Mital said. "It's very low-labor because it has a motor."

The tub will kill any pathogens in the compost mix within 72 hours, Donahue said.

Odor is a concern for customers who compost, but the Earth Tub is designed to neutralize any bad smells by using microorganisms to pull any odors out of the air coming off the Earth Tub, Donahue said.

"It's easy; it's a nice educational opportunity for people participating in urban garden," Mital said. "It's a no-brainer when it comes right down to it. I'm glad we were able to get it done."

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