

## HOT STUFF! Making Your Compost Work for You!

By Chris Wells

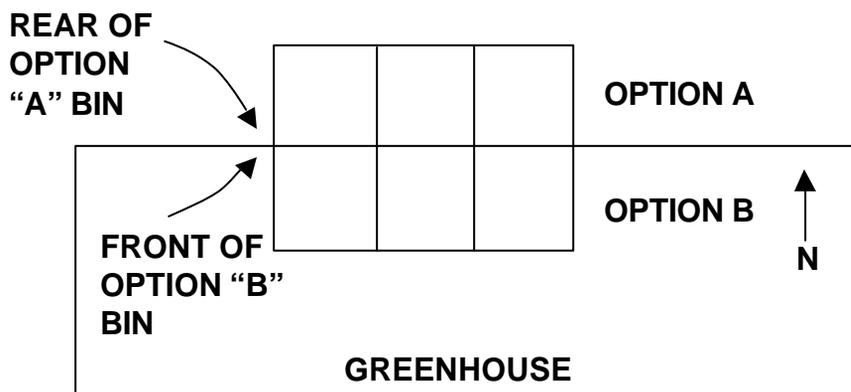
Inside  
Victoria Foundation  
funds new exciting  
project

Well, it's winter time...again. And if it was not for those wonderful conifers, it might seem as if the whole world was going dead each winter. But as most know, plants just go dormant for the winter season and then re-emerge in the spring.

Many may think that compost piles go dormant for the winter as well. But in fact, compost piles can actually remain very active through the winter season (at least in Greater Victoria!). Not only does this ensure a supply of rich compost in the spring, but it can also provide a great source of heat! By properly utilising the heat that is generated in the decomposition of organic materials, the length of our growing season can be extended, while saving energy and money.

Some examples of using heat from compost piles include: heating greenhouses by building compost bins right into our greenhouse structure; keeping seedlings warm by locating a compost pile under seedling tables; and making growing beds from compost and straw bales to generate a low heat that ensures that over-wintering greens have a warm place to send their roots.

Building a greenhouse with a compost bin attached is a superb (and easy) way to utilize heat from compost piles (Option A in Diagram 1). Build the compost bin on the outside of the north or west side of a greenhouse so as not to block any sunlight. The back of the bin (on the greenhouse side) should be more open, to let heat into the greenhouse. This can be achieved by either using ¼" hardware cloth for the back of the bin; or by having a wood backing and using 1" to 2" diameter, sparsely perforated PVC pipes layered horizontally throughout the centre of the compost pile and protruding slightly through the back of the bin (Diagram 2). The PVC method will also ensure that more air reaches the centre of the pile, thus keeping the pile hotter for longer.



Using compost to keep seedlings warm can be done in a greenhouse (Option B in Diagram 1), but can also be done in an already (or custom) built bin. To do this in a greenhouse, build the compost bin so that the front of the compost bin is flush with the outside of the greenhouse. This will take up more space in the greenhouse, but can be well worth it for an early start on seedlings. If using this method on a new or already existing bin, just make sure that it is well covered and protected from the elements.

Diagram 1: Three Bin Composter Attached to a Greenhouse

....Continued on page 3

SAVE THE DATE!

May 1, 2004 - The Wild Garden Party Tour

A Showcase of Beautiful and Sustainable Landscapes and Gardens

Brought to you by the Wild Garden Party Project

For upcoming information, check out Habitat Acquisition Trust's website at [www.hat.bc.ca](http://www.hat.bc.ca) or call 386-WORM



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THE LATEST DIRT**

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Dear Compost Club Members

Seasons Greetings!



On behalf of the Compost Education Centre, I thank you for supporting the programs and services we offer. Your continued membership and donations are important and help us to provide quality compost and organic gardening education programs to Greater Victoria residents.

Here are some highlights from 2003:

- Over 86,000 kg. of organic waste was diverted from the landfill through the sale of composters
- Over 1300 school aged children participated in the schools program
- 54 workshops were offered on site
- Over 5000 contacts were made at community outreach events
- Winter veggie starts and seed garlic were offered for sale for the first time
- Two Compost Educator Volunteer Training Sessions were offered
- An advanced composting workshop was offered for the first time
- Over 5.5 million potential contacts were made through free media

In 2004, we will be offering new topics for the Compost Club workshops, as well as other more in depth workshops on composting and organic gardening. Stay tuned for the 2004 schedule! In addition, we will continue to produce and sell limited supplies of veggie starts for your garden, will be facilitating three Compost Educator Volunteer Training Sessions, and will also have a new project on the go called Homes and Habitats: A Wild Garden Party Project (see article in this issue).

During the month of December, the demonstration site will be closed to visitors. We will reopen on Wednesday, January 7. At that time, our hours will be Wednesday to Saturday from 10-4. If you have a composting question during this time, please feel free to leave a message on the hotline: 386-WORM. Calls will be checked and returned during December.

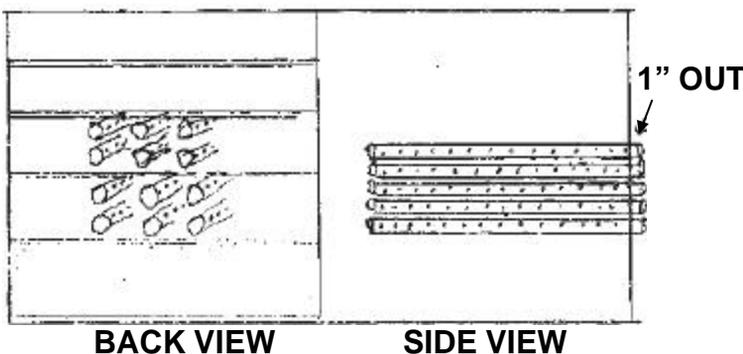
Happy Holidays, and see you in the New Year.

Lynn Marie  
Coordinator

We gratefully acknowledge the core funding support that we receive from the CRD and the City of Victoria. Additional support is provided by the Fernwood Community Association and through the generosity of our Compost Club Members and the residents of Greater Victoria.

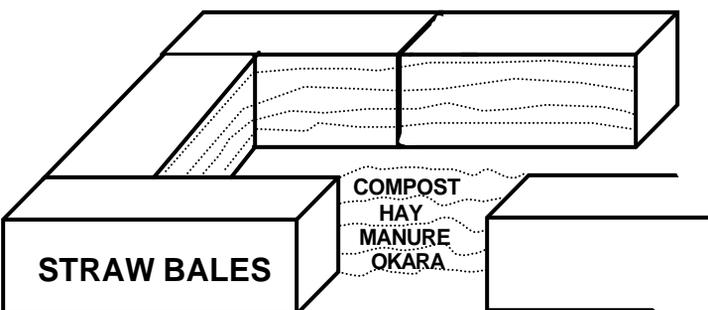
## HOT STUFF (continued from page 1)

Once you have built the compost pile, simply place the seedling trays (or plants or cuttings you are trying to propagate) directly on top of the compost pile. To allow more heat to rise to the surface, vertically pierce the compost pile with 1" densely perforated PVC pipe, making sure that the top of the pipe is flush with the top of the compost pile. You will have to move the seedlings and cuttings to turn or aerate the compost pile, but they can be moved back immediately afterwards.



**Diagram 2 PVC Pipes Inserted in Composter**

With the above methods, keep in mind a few of the essential components of maintaining an active, hot compost pile: cover and protect from the wind and rain; maintain a pile volume between 9 feet and 25 feet cubed; aerate or turn when the compost temperature starts to drop; and add more nitrogen rich material when turning the pile.



**Diagram 3: Straw Bale Raised Beds**

A simple method of trenching, combined with the use of straw bales can be used to create a heat bed for overwintering greens like lettuce and oriental vegetables (Diagram 3). This can also be done in the Spring, to get an early start on growing greens. First, make a rectangle bed out of straw bales that is one straw bale wide and as long as is appropriate (just like making raised beds with wood – just taller, cheaper, and easier!). Layer the area in between the straw bales with 6" of manure and 6" of okara (by-product of tofu making process). If okara is unavailable, use more manure (poultry manure works well as it is high in nitrogen).

Once the okara and manure have been laid down, compress the layers by placing a small piece of plywood on top, and then standing on it. Repeat this as necessary until all parts of the bed have been compressed. After the manure and okara, add a 6" layer of hay, straw or leaves. Top the bed with a compost or rich soil mix and plant your seeds! The manure and okara will break down slowly and emanate a slow constant heat, that can keep the bed warm for months. The straw bales will allow just enough air to pass through to keep the process alive. This can be done both inside a greenhouse and outside in a garden. If done outside, cover the bed with a plastic cloche, to prevent the soil from becoming drenched in the winter rain.

These are only a few methods for utilizing the heat from compost piles. By experimenting with different methods and different designs, an endless number of uses can be derived from the heat created within a compost pile. Ever had a compost-warmed veggie burger?

### Christmas Gifts that Make a Difference

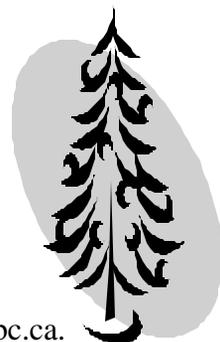


Website:  
[www.soapexchange.com](http://www.soapexchange.com)

Looking for that perfect, environmentally friendly Christmas gift? Would you like to support local organizations? The Soap Exchange, located at Hillside and Cedar Hill Rd, may be the place for you. When you purchase items from the Soap Exchange, 10% of that purchase is donated to the Compost Education Centre when you mention our name. From bath bars to essential oils, shampoos, and cleaning products, the Soap Exchange provides a "comprehensive collection of products which are 100% biodegradable", with an emphasis on minimal packaging and refills for most products. The next time you are at the Soap Exchange, tell owner, Wes, you would like your 10% to go to the Compost Education Centre- and enjoy pampering yourself and your loved ones this Christmas!

### Christmas Tree Chipping

Looking for a way to recycle your Christmas tree? For information on where to take your tree after the holidays, phone the CRD hotline at 360-3030, or email [hotline@crd.bc.ca](mailto:hotline@crd.bc.ca).





**VICTORIA  
FOUNDATION**

Imagine for a moment a community of affordable homes, with a surrounding landscape that is beautiful and practical for families, yet respectful and welcoming of wildlife. If you can envision this, then you have seen the inspiration for a unique, and innovative project: Homes and Habitats: A Wild Garden Party Project. More than just a vision, the planning of this project is well on its way after being awarded a grant from the JW McConnell Family Foundation/Victoria Foundation Environmental Funding Program.

The goal of the Homes and Habitats Project is to design and create a low-maintenance, water-wise, organic landscape that augments wildlife habitat, produces food, and recycles organic waste. The significance of this project is that it brings together eight community minded organizations to simultaneously address both social and environmental issues. The site of the landscape is a six-unit subdivision being built for low-income families through the efforts of Victoria Habitat for Humanity. VHFH is a not for profit agency dedicated to eliminating poverty housing. The supporting environmental organizations, collectively called the Wild Garden Party, have partnered together in the past to encourage responsible and environmentally sound homeowner practices. Members of the Wild Garden Party include City Green, Habitat Acquisition Trust, Naturescape BC, LifeCycles Project Society, the Native Plant Study Group, the Native Plant Society of BC and the Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre.

This project will also go beyond the creation of a landscape: it will leave a lasting legacy to the Greater Victoria community through the creation and distribution of a framework, or how-to manual. This framework will outline the methods to create other similar landscapes and be made available to local organizations and developers. Our vision is that the Homes and Habitats project will continue for years to come, so that every Victoria Habitat for Humanity Home will have a low impact, useful landscape, and other new and existing developments will always have a blueprint from which to create landscapes that enhance and protect the environment.

Thank you again to the JW McConnell Family Foundation/Victoria Foundation Environmental Funding Program for supporting this important project.

If you would like more information about this project, would like to support it with a donation, or want to be involved as a volunteer, contact Lynn at the Compost Education Centre at 386-9676.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
DONATIONS**

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to the following individuals for their generosity in donating to the Centre.

- |               |            |
|---------------|------------|
| M. Berry      | D. Rutman  |
| Gerard Family | E. Molnar  |
| R. Gillmor    | M. Penney  |
| R. Grant      | J. Simpson |
| S. Johnson    |            |

**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES  
Looking Ahead to the New Year**

For the last ten years, the Compost Education Centre has offered a unique training program for volunteers. Called the Compost Educator Volunteer Training Program (CEP - formerly named the Master Composter Program) it has trained over 200 volunteers in the science of composting, and the art of public outreach. In 2004, the CEP was offered twice to allow greater flexibility for volunteers. Volunteers who graduated from this program in 2003 were instrumental in reaching over 5000 Greater Victoria residents at community outreach events.

The CEP will again be offered in 2004-three times! These dates will be finalized in the New Year, but will most likely be set for late February, June and in September.

If you like to socialize and have an interest in compost education, call Louise at 386-WORM for more details.

**THE LATEST DIRT** is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the fall issue is February 26, 2004. Submissions to the newsletter can be sent to the Compost Education Centre. Unless otherwise noted, articles appearing in this newsletter may be reprinted only in other not-for-profit publications, with the credit given to the author (when named) and **THE LATEST DIRT**.

