

# Lincoln Composting Operation Saves Landfill Space

Grass clippings and leaves account for about one-third of the residential waste stream during the growing season. When the State of Nebraska was developing strategies to promote waste reduction and recycling, this waste stream was targeted. It is a waste stream that can be separated from other wastes relatively easy and the approach to make beneficial uses from it are relatively inexpensive when compared to other recycling options.

When the Nebraska State Legislature passed the Integrated Solid Waste Management Act in 1992 one of the key components was to prohibit the disposal of grass clippings and leaves in sanitary landfills during the growing season, from April 1 to November 30 of each year. During this time, the state can fine any city or

county up to \$5,000 per day for dumping grass clippings and leaves in landfills.

Based on this legislation the city developed the 16 acre yard waste compost facility next to the Bluff Road Sanitary Landfill. This site receives about 20,000 tons of grass, leaves, and brush each year. This is equivalent to about 2,000 garbage trucks during an eight month period.

Grass is mixed with leaves and wood chips to form windrows roughly 6-feet high and 12-feet wide. It takes 9 to 12 months to complete the composting process. The

material is screened to remove any debris and wood chips and placed in a curing pile for another three months.

Since the program began in

debris includes tree debris that was wood chipped from the 1993 and 1997 storms as well as the material diverted from the landfill by the Parks and

Recreation Department. For an average year the compost facility grinds about 6,000 tons of brush and tree debris.

The diversion of grass leaves and brush to the composting program for seven-years, has added nearly two-years to the life of the sanitary landfill. If

the amount of material is diverted over the remaining life of the landfill, another 4.25-years will be added to the landfills' life. Gene Hanlon,

recycling coordinator, believes the compost program is successful because it saves valuable landfill space and produces a beneficial product that improves soils in the county. He states; one of the program's goals is to become self-funded. Currently, the capital and operating costs of the program exceeds the revenue received from disposal fees and sale of finished compost. As a result, the city has raised the cost of compost and wood chips. This year, compost will sell for \$6 a cubic yard and wood chips for \$5 a cubic yard, only a dollar increase from last year. A limited amount of compost is made available at no charge each spring at the North 48 Street Transfer Station. Please call 441-8215 for more information on the composting program. (GH)



October, 1992, the city has composted close to 111,800 tons of grass and leaves, and wood chipped 171,738 tons of tree debris. The amount of tree

## Checklist for Subscribing to Special Yard Waste Collection

If you subscribed to the separate grass and leaf collection through your garbage hauler last year, you will automatically be subscribed when this year's program begins April 1. Here's a checklist to make sure you are prepared for the separate yard waste collection.

- Secure proper container for grass clippings and leaves. Remember, any waste container you provide, should not be larger than 32 gallons and have a tight fitting lid. Your refuse hauler may provide a yard waste, 90-gallon cart for a small fee. No plastic bags can be used for grass and leaves.

- Make sure your yard waste container is clean. Any household waste contaminates the compost and causes problems at the compost facility. Haulers can be fined up to \$50

if contaminants are found in the yard waste. This cost may be passed on to the customer.

- Bundle brush in four-to five-foot lengths.

- If you are new in the neighborhood or are unsure if you have subscribed to the special yard waste collection, contact your refuse hauler.

### Frequently asked Questions

#### Q: What is yard waste?

A: Yard waste is defined as grass and leaves only. This includes crab grass and pine needles. Yard waste must be free of any other waste, debris, and contaminates because these items seriously affect the quality of Lincoln's finished compost product. Other vegetative wastes may be mixed with yard waste and sent to the city's composting site. This includes tree, bush and shrubbery trimmings which are less than

one-inch in diameter, and vegetative garden wastes and flower cuttings.

#### Q: Why is grass and leaves banned from landfill disposal?

A: The City of Lincoln bans grass and leaf disposal to save valuable landfill space and to create a recycled product which has a beneficial use. Over 14,000 tons of grass and leaves are diverted from the landfill each year.

#### Q: When is yard waste banned from the landfill?

A: Grass and leaves cannot be disposed of in the sanitary landfill from April 1 through November 30.

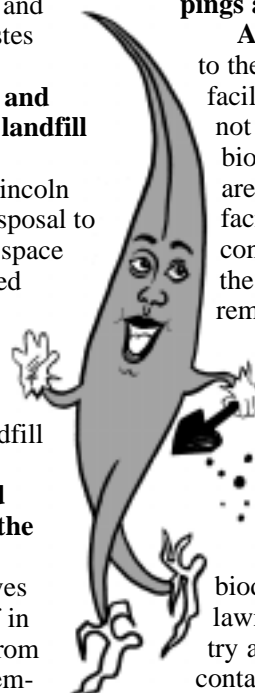
#### Q: Why can't I use plastic bags for grass clip-

#### pings and leaves?

A: Yard waste is taken to the city's composting facility. Since, plastic does not decompose, only biodegradable paper bags are accepted at this facility. There would be considerable expense if the city or haulers had to remove yard waste from plastic bags.

#### Q: What kind of container should I use for yard waste?

A: Use paper lawn bags. Many local stores stock biodegradable, paper lawn bags. Or you could try a 32-gallon refuse container with a tight fitting lid. If you have your waste hauler pick up your yard waste, they may provide a 90-



gallon, two wheel cart for you.

#### Q: How can I get finished compost?

A: Screened compost is available for households at the North 48 Street Transfer Station at no charge on a first-come, first-serve basis. Screened compost is also available at various landscape companies. Larger users interested in 20 cubic yards or more of compost can obtain compost by placing orders through the Lincoln Recycling Office. There is a minimum charge of \$6.00 per cubic yard plus a loading and delivery fee.

#### Q: Can the city deliver compost?

A: Yes. There must be a minimum order of 20 cubic yards. A delivery fee is assessed based on quantity and type of delivery equipment used. (GH)



The city of Lincoln Recycling Office has announced the availability of LinGro compost. LinGro is a new term developed by Public Works and Utilities for the organic compost produced from grass clippings, leaves and wood chips. The public can obtain LinGro compost in bulk quantities from eight retail outlets in Lincoln.

The eight retailers that will make half-inch screened LinGro compost available to the public are: All Care Grounds Maintenance, 300

South Coddington Ave.; Campbell's Nurseries and Garden Centers, 7000 South 56th Street; General Excavating, 6701 Cornhusker Highway; Landscapes by Leuders; Nebraska Nursery and Color Gardens, 7801 Pioneers Blvd; Nemaha Nursery, 430 West Pioneers Blvd; Naturescapes; and Seeds of Life. The LinGro compost is only available in bulk quantities from these locations. A nominal fee is charged for the material by these retailers.

The main advantage of using LinGro compost is its ability to improve soil structure by increasing the water-holding capacity of the soil; adding beneficial micro-organisms to

the soil; increasing soil porosity; and decreasing the bulk density of the soil. LinGro compost is also an excellent top dressing for lawns. It improves soil fertility and water infiltration.

The city of Lincoln also distributes compost to the public. A limited quantity of the LinGro compost is available at the 48th Street Transfer Station at no cost. It is available on a first come, first served basis and individuals must self-load the material. People wanting 20 cubic yards or more of compost can also obtain the compost directly from the city by calling the city of Lincoln's Recycling Office at 441-7043.

The city of Lincoln also distributes wood chips to the public. Free wood chips are available from Oak Lake Park, 1st and Cornhusker Highway on a first-come, first-served basis and must be self-loaded. The 48th Street Transfer Station also has wood chips available for a fee and will load pick-up trucks.

The city of Lincoln receives about 14,500 tons of grass and leaves each year and 6,500 tons of brush during the growing season. Residents must separate grass clippings and leaves from their household trash from April 1 through November 30 of each year. Individuals that subscribe to the special yard waste collection

may put brush under one inch in diameter with their grass clippings and leaves. Individuals that do not subscribe to the special yard waste collection may put their brush and tree trimmings with their household trash.

Information on proper application of LinGro compost and incorporation into the soil is available from the City Recycling Office, participating retailers and the Cooperative Extension Service. Partial funding for the city's composting program was provided by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, Waste Reduction and Recycling Program.(GH)

## Compost Available From The City

## Answers to Composting Questions

### What kinds of materials can be composted?

Yard and garden residues and other organic materials are suitable for composting. This includes leaves, grass clippings, straw and hay, sawdust, and finely chopped or shredded tree and shrub prunings.

### Can kitchen scraps be added to a compost pile?

Certain kitchen scraps can be added to the compost pile, such as fruit and vegetable trimmings, coffee grounds and eggshells. Bury them in the pile to prevent odors and flies. Do not add meat scraps, bones,

grease, whole eggs, or dairy products to the compost pile because they are slow to decompose, will cause odors, and can attract rodents.

### What is the optimum size for a compost pile?

The best size of an enclosed compost pile is between a 3' x

3' x 3'. If any smaller, it will dry out too fast; any larger and there will be poor air movement and it will be difficult to turn the pile.

### How can I avoid problems with unpleasant odors from the compost pile?

Odors may arise either

from the addition of excessive amounts of wet plant materials like fruits or grass clippings, from over watering the pile or by not turning an actively decomposing pile periodically. A properly prepared and

See ANSWERS on page 8a