

BIN PROMOTIONS MOVE LEAVES FROM CURB TO BACKYARD

WHEN municipal recycling coordinator Charlotte Bartlett purchased 300 backyard composting bins in May, 1996 for a one-day sale to residents in Millcreek Township, Pennsylvania, she figured there would be plenty left over. "We thought that it really wasn't going to fly and were trying to figure out where we were going to store the ones that didn't sell," she says. The bins sold out in 45 minutes. "There were cars parked all around the building and the police were hollering at me because we didn't tell them that we were having the sale," Bartlett recalls.

Since that day, more than 3,000 bins have been sold to Millcreek residents. The suburban town in Erie County has a population of 56,000 and 15,000 to 17,000 households. By using the bins, Bartlett estimates that residents have reduced the amount of leaves going to the local landfill by almost 300 tons. Leaves are picked up from residential curbsides six times annually as part of the township's contract with a private hauler. In 1997, 901 tons of leaves were collected, compared to 839 tons in 1998 and 624 tons in 1999.

Bartlett and the township's nine-member volunteer recycling committee tested several compost bins before selecting a model manufactured by Covered Bridge Organic, Inc. in Jefferson, Ohio. Bartlett contacted bin distributors and seven sent free containers. Members of the township's volunteer recycling committee took the composters home and used them during the fall of 1995 and spring of 1996. "We would go to each others' houses and compare our experiences," says Bartlett. The township receives funding from the state to subsidize most of the cost. "We pay \$25/bin and sell them to the public for \$6," says Bartlett.

A flyer was distributed and an advertisement placed in the local paper to promote the sale. A compost specialist held a workshop during the day. "We videotaped one of the compost workshops so that it could be shown on community access cable," he says. "You're asking people to change their lifestyles, so you have to give them the mo-

Pennsylvania town embraces backyard composting bins, diverting almost 300 tons of leaves from the local landfill.

Molly Farrell



tivation to do it. People need to know not only how to make compost, but how to use it after they make it."

At the first sale, hundreds more people wanted to buy bins than were available. "We took their names and phone numbers and a couple of weeks later, received another 500 bins," says Bartlett. Since then, she has kept a supply on hand.

The township holds a composter sale in the spring and another in the fall. The sales are so popular that they are only publicized through a recycling calendar mailed to households.

Only one bin has been returned. "A lot of people call and tell me how wonderful their gardens are and how much money they've saved from not having to buy compost," Bartlett says.

The composters are made of 100 percent postconsumer, black HPDE. The 30-by-12-inch bin adjusts to two sizes: a three-foot diameter with an 18-cubic foot capacity, and a four-foot diameter with a 30-cubic foot capacity.

Intake slits at the bottom of the bin draw air up through the contents. The finished compost is collected by using hand holds at the top to pull it up off the organics. Consumers can purchase an optional cover for the bin, but most residents have not. "Without a cover, the composting materials can get the sun and rain and you don't have a cover that can blow off," Bartlett says. "You don't need a cover because the sides of the bin are designed so that animals can't climb up it." ■

Reprinted From:
April, 2000

BIOCYCLE

JOURNAL OF COMPOSTING & ORGANICS RECYCLING

419 State Avenue, Emmaus, PA 18049-3097
610-967-4135 • www.biocycle.net