

Advocating for Composting

Actions Students Can Take at School

You are tomorrow's leaders, and taking action to reduce wasted food will help create a more sustainable food system. When food is wasted, the resources that went into growing, harvesting, and transporting it are also wasted. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation created this guide to help you identify ways to educate yourself and others about managing food scraps sustainably through composting.



Supporter—Beginner Actions

These are actions you can take as an individual or with a school environmental club.

- ❑ **Read Compost Stories:** From kid-friendly stories to instructional books on how to compost, educate yourself about all things composting by reading! There is a wide selection of books available on composting for all ages.
- ❑ **Organize an Educational Poster and Flyer Campaign:** Educate your peers and teachers through a poster and flyer campaign. Use your creativity to provide statistics and information on the benefits of composting and what individuals and your school can do to get involved with composting.
- ❑ **Participate in the International Compost Awareness Week Poster and Bookmark Contest:** Each year, the Compost Research & Education Foundation picks a theme for International Compost Awareness Week and promotes the theme through a bookmark and poster designed by individuals across the world. The bookmark challenge is geared toward grades 3–8, and the poster contest is open to grades 9–12 and adults.
- ❑ **Create a Composting-Related Art Project (Class or Contest):** Art is a powerful tool to communicate and analyze environmental issues. Get creative and make compost-related art as a part of a class project or turn it into a school-wide competition!



Advocate—Intermediate Actions

These are actions you can take with a school environmental club or teacher.

- ❑ **Read Composting Books to Younger Students:** Help educate younger students at your school by hosting a compost-related book reading as part of a class or club. For example, middle and high school students could pick a fun, compost-related book and read it to kindergarteners or first graders.
- ❑ **Host a Documentary Screening:** Host a screening of a compost- or soil-related documentary (e.g., *The Compost Story* by Kiss the Ground). The screening could be done as part of a class, club meeting, or community event at your school.
- ❑ **Conduct a Compost Research Project:** Lead a research project to investigate what currently happens to food that is wasted at your school or in your community and how much is generated.
- ❑ **Perform a Cafeteria Food Waste Audit:** Conduct a food waste audit in your school's cafeteria to quantify the amount of food your school wastes. Work with the cafeteria staff or your club advisor to figure out the logistics (i.e., timing, equipment needed, etc.) of a food waste audit at your school.
- ❑ **Go on a Composting Field Trip:** Organize a class or club trip to see a composting operation in action!
- ❑ **Design a Compost Mascot:** School mascots help promote school spirit and engagement around sports, so why not create a compost mascot to do the same around composting? Use your creativity to come up with a mascot that represents composting to you, like a worm.

- **Create a Poster Competition:** This competition allows students to create a poster that showcases the importance of composting at home, school, and in your community. A poster competition is a great way to engage students of all ages and can be used as part of a poster and flyer campaign across your school.
- **Host a Food Waste Buffet:** A significant portion of food that is thrown out is still edible. During a lunch period, collect food from your peers that they were going to throw away. Use the food to create a food waste buffet to visually showcase all the food and meals that are wasted by students in one day. Then compost or throw away the wasted food.
- **Organize Educational Campaigns and Events During Earth Week and International Compost Awareness Week:** Host an event during Earth Week or International Compost Awareness Week related to composting. Use the action items and event suggestions listed above. For International Compost Awareness Week, see if your school board or local community will sign a proclamation recognizing the week.
- **Start a School-Wide Composting Program:** Setting up a school-wide composting program is a complex process that involves significant planning as well as school staff effort to ensure the program functions properly. Work with a teacher and administrator to discuss what type of program may work for your school.
 - **Compost at Your School:** Build or purchase a compost bin to compost your school's food scraps.
 - **Partner with a Local Composting Facility:** If you're unable to compost at your school, you can still compost by partnering with a local composting facility. Speak with a teacher, club advisor, or administrator to research options in your community. You may also be able to connect with local farms to see if they would be interested in taking food scraps to feed their animals.
- **Host a Wasted Food and Composting Expo Community Night:** Host a school event where community partners focused on reducing wasted food or composting can table, answer questions, and promote their work to students and other community members.
- **Incorporate Composting into Your Curriculum:** Talk with your teacher to see if composting-related lessons and projects can be incorporated into your school curriculum. Explore resources at the New York Climate Education Hub (nyclimateeducation.org).

Champion—Advanced Actions

These are actions you can take with a school environmental club, teacher, administrator, or community partner.

- **Create a School Garden:** School gardens allow students to learn and see the food cycle firsthand, from garden to plate to compost. Food grown in the garden can be used in your school or by the community. If you have a vermicomposting bin or school composting program, you can also use that compost in your school garden or flower beds.
- **Set up Classroom Worm Bins (Vermicomposting):** Vermicomposting, or composting with worms, is one method for composting that can be done indoors and at a small scale. Work with a teacher or an environmental club advisor to see if they would be willing to host a vermicomposting bin in their classroom. Once you have a vermicomposting bin started, collect fruit and vegetables from students and teachers to turn into a compost.
- **Attend a Local Town Hall to Advocate for Composting:** Local town halls are a great way to advocate for sustainable action in your community. Most town halls offer a public comment period, allowing you to come with a prepared statement supporting composting in your community.
- **Meet with a Local Elected Official to Discuss Composting:** Schedule a meeting with a local elected official to talk with them about the problem of wasting food, the benefits of composting, and why you'd like to see more composting opportunities in your community.

If you have questions or are looking to connect with other K-12 schools, email OrganicRecycling@dec.ny.gov.

