

Composting Challenge hopes to expand to 200 households

By Brock Weir

Following the success of last year's Greener Gardens Composting program, Aurora is getting ready to up the ante.

Once the weather warms up and you start thinking seriously about your springtime garden, the Town hopes you will be one of 200 residents to take them up on their offer for free backyard composting to keep safe food and yard waste out landfill and out of the costly Green Bin waste diversion program.

Launched one year ago this month, the Greener Gardens Composting pilot program brought residents together to receive a composter, scale, and information on how to properly compost their organic waste. Through tracking the results, the Town of Aurora, in conjunction with the Region of York, were able to identify benefits and challenges of backyard composting and see how much waste could be diverted.

Participants monitored all the material being placed in their composters from June 15 until September 15, said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure and Environmental Services. Each participant recorded both the amount of food waste and the amount of yard waste composted during this time. 60 per cent of participants returned fully complete tracking sheets at the end of the pilot and each averaged 18.7kg of material composted over that time.

The knowledge gained from the successful completion of the pilot is now being used to extend the program further within Aurora and to other municipalities in York Region. The goal of the program expansion is to ensure residents have the incentives and necessary support to take up and sustain backyard composting and divert these organics from collection.

The pilot, he notes, showed the average household can divert over 50kg of kitchen and yard waste out of the system and into backyard composters each year and expanding the program can save a significant amount of money.

A modest participation rate of approximately 10 per cent of residents could divert 248 tonnes of food waste and yard waste out of the Regional system each year, with a potential savings of over \$25,000, said Mr. Simanovskis. Each tonne of organic material processed on site means savings to the Town as well as Regional savings related to further transportation processing and end use processing and distribution.

We are proposing to engage 200 Aurora households [with free composters] in exchange for their participation in composting education through monthly newsletters, a pledge to install and use the composter, and a follow-up survey in October. Residents will register through the Town website by early May and the bins will be awarded on a first come, first served basis.

Success will be measured by the number of registrants, inquiries and interest in the challenge. Long-term success will be measure by the ongoing engagement with the participants, including completed surveys, and the additional interest and sales of composters at York Region depots and Town of Aurora locations.