

SUMMER '23 NEWSLETTER



COMPOST CLUB UPDATES

The cicadas are singing and that's how you know summer is in full swing. Summer time at The Urban Canopy is always so exciting! Farmer's Market's are in bloom, our farm is producing bunches of beautiful produce and, as always, there is a plethora of waste to collect.

The best way to spread the word about composting is through you! Click the "Give \$10 Get \$10" button on your member portal and refer a friend to join Compost Club and you will both receive \$10.00 off your next invoice.

You might see our new yellow and black 35 gallon bins around town. Our new yellow bins really pop and it makes us happy. Remember, yellow is the color of composting in Chicago! Reach out and ask about our 35-gallon tote option.

Here is a great resource to info your friends and family about the importance and benefits of composting. You can email us with any requests and questions to compost@theurbancanopy.org.

WELCOME TO COMPOST CLUB

We would like to welcome all our new and returning members to Urban Canopy's Compost Club for the new season! We are so excited to continue to welcome new members, expand our service area, and build our community. Don't forget to refer a friend!

Take a moment to check out our LUCSA program at Urban Canopy. [Here is a link to their website!](#) LUCSA stands for Local Unified Community Supported Agriculture. This means that our CSA draws from a number of local farms and vendors including our own Urban Canopy farm in Auburn-Gresham to supply fresh seasonal produce to your door. If this sounds as awesome to you as it does to us you can sign up for LUCSA's fall season today right here: [LUCSA FALL SEASON!](#) If you miss it this time, have no fear, you can always sign up for the following season or sometimes there are still spots open if you ask our team super nicely!

Shout Out to our Friends at The Global Garden Community Garden and their Neighbors!



Urban farming is something we, here at the Urban Canopy, are quite passionate about, so we find any opportunity to highlight folks venturing on the same quest is worth sharing. Despite the numerous benefits urban farming provides from elevating the air quality and reducing excess runoff from heavy rainfall to increasing biodiversity and pollinator habitats in urban settings, and even mitigating food insecurity and helping regulate overall air temperatures, it is a difficult journey to undertake. Urban farmers face many challenges such as limited resources and pollution. Urban farms are often subjected to highly contaminated soil and faced with complex issues surrounding access to urban water. Urban farmers press on despite these difficulties!

At the Northeast corner of Lawrence and Sacramento in Chicago's Albany Park, there are a few organizations that work towards utilizing this space as a beautiful urban farm rather than an empty lot. Urban Canopy's Compost Club has recently partnered with The Global Garden Community Garden. This is a community garden of over 180 folks (not all gardeners or farmers). Each have 6'x4' beds and do their best to grow things, some more successfully and others! Having a communal space to allow for learning is another way urban farms help the community, increasing a sense of social cohesion and togetherness. This Community Garden also has a program called "Grow2Give" which consists of over 30 beds where they grow produce that is donated to the Friendship Food Pantry on Lawrence Ave. Last year they donated hundreds of pounds of food to the food pantry.

Right next door to this community garden is the similarly named global Community Garden. This garden was started by the hard work and dedication of 42 refugee families from Burma and Bhutan. Ten years later, this garden has nearly quintupled their production! Not only does this garden harvest fresh ingredients for traditional recipes, teach about urban commercial vegetable production, and run a summer CSA as well as participate in various farmers markets, but also supplies a supplemental income for refugees! At this point not only does the Global Community Garden offer over 100 refugee families with vegetable plots, but they have several beehives on site. On top of it all you can find their produce at several restaurants and food pantries around the Chicago area.

They have an extensive list of all sorts of produce among these more general categories: Beans, Nightshades, Herbs, Gourds, Root Veggies and Leafy Greens, using only sustainable and healthy farming practices! We are so proud here at The Urban Canopy to partner with like minded folks. One of our favorite aspects of their website is the [recipes page](#). We here at The Urban Canopy are proud to partner with and be adjacent to such awesome urban farming organizations.



*Photos courtesy of Paul Bick, Field Museum

Tour of Harbor View Compost Facility

On a beautiful Spring day, Compost Club Mangers, stood before a large hill covered in prairie grasses creating a pleasant sound as the breeze passed through. The air smelled fresh and the gentle sound of wildlife was calming. We had the opportunity to tour the Whole Earth Compost facility where much of our collected compostable materials are processed and turned into a nutrient rich soil product. It is [here](#) where most of your compost goes!

This operation is located near Big Marsh right in the middle of Lake Calumet, and sits on top of a capped landfill from the 90s that stretches for 34 acres and is nearly 700 feet in altitude. It might not seem like much, but considering Illinois' landscape it was about the tallest thing around allowing sight for miles. What was most jarring about this space is this massive hill was filled with 875,000 tons of trash in just two years! For reference, Urban Canopy's Compost Club hauls between 16 and 20 tons of compost a week and that is just from our approximately 4,000 members. You can imagine in a city of 2.6 million people how quickly these spaces are filled with waste.

Materials are brought up to the facility via 40 yard dump trucks and is placed in large piles for sorting. A chance for Gulls and Terns get a free lunch! What is known as both "green"(high in nitrogen) and "brown" (high in carbon) materials are screened for large contaminates, macerated and combined into large wind rows. These 9 foot tall, 18 foot wide and 400 to 600 yard long piles are where the compostable materials are broken down into a useable soil product over the course of 90 days. This is known as aerobic composting when materials break down with the use of oxygen. A machine that expands the width of the windrows drives over each one, turning the materials. Once the material completes the windrow portion, it is taken by a front loader over to yet another screening device to weed out any more contaminates like fruit stickers or smaller pieces of plastic that squeezed through the first screening. This finished compost material is then examined for it's purity and upon passing examination is thus, what is now nutrient rich soil, is ready for retail. It was an awesome experience to tour the facility and we thank the folks at Whole Earth for allowing us to do so.



Common Misconceptions about Environmentalism and Composting

The complex process that compostable waste goes through to become the nutrient rich product that we are able to use on our farm and give back to our members as a reward or salable product is truly amazing. Make no mistake, this process is a difficult one where one must take care to use the proper ratios of different types of compostable materials to create a high quality finished product. The pictures to the right are from the compost processing site. Please notice the fair amount of plastic and wood chips. There is plenty of material that can't break down in the allotted amount of time or can't break down at all. That is why it is important for each member to take consideration as to what goes into their compost bin or bucket.

It is easy to be deceived by products that claim to turn your organic waste into compost in a matter of hours. Take caution with counter-top devices such as Lomi or Aireatherial. These products don't so much compost your food scraps as much as they dehydrate your food scraps. It is easy to make something seem environmentally friendly, when the actual story is much more complicated.

It is difficult if not impossible to offer a definitively correct solution to any environmental problem through action because of the vast complexity. For example, this is why hybrid or electric vehicles aren't always the right or best way to be entirely environmentally friendly. Manufacturing a Tesla battery takes anywhere between 3 (3,120 kg) to 16 (15,680 kg) tons of CO2 emissions. Of course once the batteries are used in vehicles they are charged by whatever energy source is most readily used in the area. (It is generally positive that Illinois is primarily nuclear powered.) Moreover, the large machinery it requires to mine lithium and cobalt and the incredibly poor wages for many miners. On top of it all, through these processes of mining the possibility for ground water contamination increases exponentially.

By comparison, one of our classic combustion trucks produces 255 kg of CO2 emissions per month and we sequester easily 5 times that with each route we do. Not saying we as a society don't need to be looking towards new and more sustainable energy sources, but rather to acknowledge how far away we are from truly sustainable power sources without compromise.



*Pile of discarded materials (primarily wood chips and plastic bags) after the first sorting at Whole Earth Compost



*Final processing stage of finished compost product at Whole Earth Compost Facility
Photos courtesy of Andrew Meland

How your Food can Help with Inflammation

New research published in the Journal of Nutrition shows some exciting new data supporting the idea that dietary and lifestyle choices can collectively contribute to substantial or even chronic inflammation in the body. The study is linked above if you are interested in the specific methods used, but basically over 30,000 people participated to share food and lifestyle habits wherein researchers were able to then devise an "inflammation score" to find out which foods and life style habits can effect your bodies ability to handle inflammation. The more negative the number the better it is for your body to fight inflammation, whereas the more positive the number is the more potential that has to cause inflammation. Here is a list of some of the items from the study:

Anti-Inflammatory:

Multi-vitamin: -0.80
Tomatoes: -0.78
Moderate drinker: -0.66
Apples & berries: -0.65
Yellow & orange produce: -0.57
Poultry: -0.45
Nuts: -0.44
Exercise >4 times/week: -0.41
Coffee & tea: -0.25
Exercise 1-3 times/week: -0.18
Fresh fruit: -0.16
Vegetables: -0.16
Leafy & cruciferous vegetables: -0.14
High-fat/low-fat dairy: -0.14/-0.12
Fish: -0.08
Legumes: -0.04

INFLAMMATORY:

Heavy drinker: 0.30
Other fats (margarine, veg oil): 0.31
Current smoker: 0.50
Added sugars: 0.56
Processed meats: 0.68
Refined grains: 0.72

Middle of the Road:

Red & organ meat: 0.02



This is by no means a reason to stop taking medicine or seeing your doctor for persistent issues, but it is interesting how much your diet might effect how we feel. As the adage goes, "we are what we eat." Some interesting take aways might be, eating a plethora of different colored fruits and vegetables mixed with at least 4 times a week of exercise (20 minutes!) Limiting refined grains and those pesky added sugar contents as well as eating red meat in moderation can be helpful as well. In this sense, doing a lot of little steps can help you live an anti-inflammatory lifestyle. We all know the too much inflammation is bad, its what causes all of our noses to run and our joints to ache!

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