Navigating Seattle’s New Food, Yard Waste Collection

Laila Suidan, Environmental Educator

No doubt you’ve heard the news that Seattle’s food and yard waste collection system recently changed. As of March 30, all single-family households that did not already subscribe to yard waste collection were automatically subscribed for a small, 13-gallon roller cart that will be collected weekly. The new cart reaches to about knee height, and is strikingly tiny compared with the original 96-gallon yard waste carts. People may choose a larger size, or opt out of the service if they compost food at home.

With the weekly collection, meat and dairy will now be accepted in the bins—another significant change. Collection prices also are changing. The Garden Hotline has been fielding hundreds of calls about the new system; we thought that you might want to know some of the answers.

Q: I compost food at home and will opt out of collection. What does the city want me to do with my meat and dairy scraps now?
A: If you produce a lot of meat and dairy scraps, consider subscribing to the collection. If you produce less, talk with a friendly neighbor about using some space in their cart, or continue to throw them in your garbage.

Q: How do I demonstrate that I compost food at home to opt out of this service?
A: Call the Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) customer service line, (206) 684-3000, and tell them that you compost food at home. You must be willing to have an inspector come and verify that you have a system set up if SPU decides to check up on you.

Friends Getting Into Gardening? Bring Them to Our Edible Plant Sale

A trip to the Seattle Tilth Edible Plant Sale, coming May 2-3, is a great introduction to food gardening. Encourage your friends to come to the sale because:

- We carefully select plant varieties that are known to perform well in Pacific Northwest gardens;
- Our plant signage provides all the basic information about each variety, such as ease of growing, plant requirements, and particular flavors of different varieties;
- Knowledgeable volunteers roam the sale answering questions; and
- In our adjacent garden, you can self-tour to see our growing methods, or take a class during the sale (remind your friends that pre-registration is required for classes).

Tilth is seeing a surge of interest in food gardening and hearing from people who are planning to rip up their lawns, expand their vegetable gardens and become more self-sufficient. Such enthusiasm is great, but we need allies in the field to meet this rising demand. You can help by sharing your knowledge of and love for gardening with a friend.

What’s New?

This year, we are stocking up on crops that do well in Seattle’s typically cool summer, like broccoli, kale and the smaller, earlier tomatoes. You’ll also find crops you may have never grown like stevia, hops, kohlrabi, Thai basil or edible flowers. Our Website has the complete list, so you can research what you want to grow before the sale.

Shorter Lines. Our busy sale has made it a challenge to check out quickly. This year, we’re trying new ways to make the checkout lines shorter and faster. A wonderful group of volunteers is working solely on the issue. The new process includes increased

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Five Questions for New ED

Andrea Dwyer

Andrea Platt Dwyer began serving as Seattle Tilth’s executive director on March 2. She has worked for non-profits through most of her 30-year career, most recently serving as the chief executive officer of Camp Fire USA’s Minnesota Council, a post she held for 10 years. She moved to Seattle last summer.

What excited you about working at Seattle Tilth?

I’ve been a long-time proponent of locally grown, sustainably produced food and I think the ability to create a garden where you live is really something everyone should know how to do. It’s great to help people make healthier choices about what we eat and where it came from.

One thing that most impressed and attracted me to Tilth is the vast number of dedicated volunteers who support this great organization in so many ways.

How does your Camp Fire USA experience translate to Tilth work?

One of our core values at Camp Fire was respect for the environment, and we were very committed to helping children learn about the environment and how to care for it. That seems very much part of Seattle Tilth’s work, not just for children but for all people.

Also, my work has been in helping organizations build sophistication and long-term stability. The more I get to know about Tilth, the more I believe it will benefit from focusing on infrastructure and sustainable growth.

What is your gardening experience?

I’ve been a very modest gardener. I like to cook, so I love having fresh herbs, which I’ve always grown outside my kitchen door. When I moved into our house in August, I immediately planted six different types of herbs and was able to snip them all winter long. What a treat that was, coming from Minnesota’s frozen winters.

What else occupies your free time?

I like bird watching, hiking, outdoors activities, camping. It’s fun to be here because of so many opportunities to do that, too.

What’s your family background?

Well, I was born in Chicago, but grew up in Ohio. I moved to Minnesota well after becoming an adult. I have five children, and three live in the Pacific Northwest — two in Seattle, one in Portland. They’re very excited for me to be working with Tilth.

I live with my partner, Kristi Lloyd, in a house in Magnolia. It’s very close to the north side of Discovery Park, and when we moved in we discovered an eagle’s nest in our backyard. Last summer there were two baby eagles in it, and we got to see them learn how to fly! Now the adults have moved back in. People hardly believe me when I tell them about that.
Leadership Changes for New Season at Seattle Tilth

Erin Randall
President, Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors, former board president Craig Skipton and I are pleased to let you know that we have completed the search for the new Executive Director. It is our distinct pleasure to introduce Andrea Platt Dwyer as the new executive director of Seattle Tilth! We are thrilled with the experience and leadership that Andrea is bringing to continue the great work of our organization.

Andrea comes to Seattle after many successful years at Camp Fire USA in Minnesota. She is an accomplished executive with 30 years of experience in leadership roles. Her experience includes both small and mid-sized organizations, where she has carried responsibility in all areas of work including financial management, program development and evaluation, human resources, board relations, fundraising, technology, facility and risk management, and community outreach.

When asked how leading Seattle Tilth fits into her plans, Andrea responded, “Over the years, I have derived significant satisfaction from working in arenas that reflect my personal values and ideals. I believe strongly that each one of us is accountable for making the world a better place, whether that be in small ways or large. The work of Seattle Tilth is important and vital to the health of our community, and it will be a privilege to contribute to these efforts.”

The ED search and selection process reinforced Seattle Tilth’s respected reputation as an environmental education organization on both a regional and national level. We were heartened by the positive responses and the well-qualified candidates that applied to be our ED. Thank you to all who helped in that process. Your time investment and leadership directly relates to Tilth’s ongoing vibrancy and prosperity.

Please take a moment to welcome Andrea and show her the heart of the organization: yourselves!

Bring Friends to Plant Sale

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staffing for key volunteer positions such as cashiers and ticket writers.

Volunteer! To put our new plan into action and to make this sale meet increased demand, we need your help. Along with the expanded check-out crew, there are many other volunteer opportunities available prior to and during the sale. Our Website has a complete listing of volunteer shifts and job descriptions. Please sign up today—this sale can’t happen without you!

Early Bird Sale. Longtime shoppers have noticed the spike in attendance in recent years and have let us know they would be willing to pay for the opportunity to shop with minimal crowds. So we’re going to try that, by holding an Early Bird Sale on Friday from 7 to 8 p.m. It will be hosted by our Board of Directors, which is taking this on as a fundraising event. This sale will be limited to 100 people. Tickets cost $25 and can be purchased online at www.brownpapertickets.com.

Green Business Sponsors. Like-minded businesses can now connect to the thousands of shoppers who attend the plant sale by becoming Edible Plant Sale sponsors. Ideal partners would be nurseries, landscaping firms using organic practices, arborists, and any business that provide sustainable goods or services. For more information, contact Liza Burke at (206) 633-0451, ext. 103 or lizaburke@seattletilth.org.

See you (and your friend) at the Edible Plant Sale May 2 and 3!

At the annual meeting in January, outgoing board members Craig Skipton, Nancy Evans and Willi Galloway showed off the hori-hori Japanese gardening knives given to them from Tilth, engraved with a thank-you for their service.
Volunteer Profile: Peggy & Jim Smith  
*Jessica Heiman, Children's Garden Educator*

Our Year of the Volunteer profile series kicks off with a team who has made a big impact on Seattle Tilth. Peggy and Jim Smith contribute in two very different and meaningful ways.

Peggy first came to Tilth as a chaperone for her grandson’s school trip to the Children’s Garden. A long-time organic gardener, she was impressed by the quality of the lesson and the way kids were so excited by the work they did in the garden. That inspired her to get involved, and she is in her third year as a volunteer teacher for spring and fall Earth Steward Tours. Peggy says she “loves the children’s sense of wonder” and the ability “to see things through their eyes that I may not have noticed otherwise.”

Peggy encouraged her husband Jim to get involved with Seattle Tilth after reading in our newsletter that we had the need for a computer database expert. Jim has his own database consulting business and has been helping our program assistant Carrie Niskanen to get things in order. As a result of his work, our database is more accessible and user-friendly. His generosity doesn’t stop there. Jim is a volunteer docent at The Museum of Flight and is helping them with two of their databases. What a team!

MC/SB Receives Hot Pile of Applications; Training Underway

*Graham Goldbluff, MC/SB Volunteer Coordinator*

The Master Composter/Soil Builder program received a (hot) pile of applications from folks eager to participate in the program this year. When the application period closed in late February, we had 111 applications for only 35 spots in the program!

Many thanks to everyone who applied. We really appreciate your interest in composting, building soil and conserving natural resources. Due to the great response, we will do our best to offer extra educational and volunteer opportunities along those lines at Seattle Tilth this year.

The training wraps up in April, and then we’ll have a new corps of volunteers tackling uncharted outreach territory, such as leading clinics to inform people about the changes to the city’s food and yard waste, recycling and garbage collection services. We also will be partnering with other organizations to lead classes where attendees can actually take home their own compost bins.

Visit our Website for more information on composting (search on compost or look in Resources under the Learn tab) or visit our demonstration gardens for displays of compost bins, composting and use of mulch in your garden.

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Volunteers Make Tilth Go!

- Thirty new and returning children’s garden volunteers attended training sessions and are leading groups of children in hands-on gardening activities.
- Volunteers are busy helping with graphic design, photography, Edible Plant Sale poster layout, membership materials and our print and electronic newsletters.
- An MC/SB volunteer designed and implemented a composting system for a large-scale community event, diverting gobs of food waste from the landfill.
- Demonstration Garden volunteers have been busy sprucing up the garden for plant sale touring and spring classes.

Volunteer now to help with the Edible Plant Sale! See all our volunteer opportunities on our Website – click on the Get Involved tab.
Our demonstration garden at the Good Shepherd Center has been a busy place this winter. In order to meet our educational goals to demonstrate organic food gardening, biodiversity, and yard and food waste composting in the city, the volunteer Garden Intern Crew has been assisting with a shrub bed renovation and garden reorganization.

New Species for Shrub Bed
This spring we are planting more than one hundred new species of plants into the garden’s renovated shrub beds. The new bed arrangement reflects recommendations from landscape architect and former board member Nicole Kistler, which she developed after coordinating a community design process in 2007.

We solicited the support of regional growers for the project, and were rewarded with plant donations from eight different nursery operations, worth an estimated $2,500. In particular, we received incredible support from Ray and Peg Prag, co-owners of Forestfarm Nursery in Williams, Oregon. Not only did they donate more than $1,000 worth of plants, but Ray drove the donation from near the California border to Salem, and picked up another grower’s donation along the way. Another volunteer, Russ Hanby, helped us immensely by traveling to Salem and bringing the large donation home to Seattle. Other donors include Bios Design, Clearview Perennials, Colvos Creek Nursery, Fern Hill Nursery, Mariposa Naturescapes, One Green World and Whitman Farms.

We have also concentrated all food waste composting demonstrations outside the west door of the greenhouse, and yard waste compost demonstrations in the northwest corner of the garden. This spatial arrangement will help to reinforce the important concept that food and yard wastes must be composted in very different ways in the city, in order to avoid attracting rodent populations.

Learn Urban Ecological Design, Help Us Renovate
You can take part in renovating our demonstration garden at the Good Shepherd Center while learning about design concepts that can be used to create healthy urban landscapes. We’ve created a four-session class on urban ecological design. Students will study sound ecological design practices and help implement the design, which will serve as an ongoing, public demonstration of the principles.

In the first class in April, “Conserving Resources,” you will learn strategies for conserving and recycling resources in your landscape and neighborhood. Areas of focus will include techniques for harnessing the sun’s heating potential with passive solar design; rainwater harvesting with cisterns, rain gardens, green roofs, swales and berms; nutrient cycling, conservation, and creating multifunction systems in your landscape and community.

Hands-on learning will include connecting rain barrel overflow to a drainage area and green roof maintenance. Students also will help install a rain garden in our demonstration garden. A rain garden is a planted, compost-rich depression that corresponds to the size of an adjacent roof or other impermeable surface. The new rain garden will replace a dry well, which is a depression filled with rubble, adjacent to our impermeable main path. Current best practices for rain water infiltration are to use a rain garden instead of dry wells.

A related class in May, “An Introduction to Ecological Design,” offers an overview of design concepts and then teaches you how to apply them in an urban landscape.

Both classes are now accepting registrations, and can be found in our Website class listings under the Learn tab.
The Sophisticated Peasant

Shovel-Ready

In light of the vigorous national debate, I’m obliged to ask the pointed question: can any project be more shovel-ready than the springtime garden? Unless, that is, you practice a form of no-dig gardening, as I believe some do. More on that later.

If you can read this, then you’ve made it through another winter and will no doubt be eager for the swelling buds and green shoots that signal the beginnings of our maritime northwest spring. Cherry blossoms and daffodils and April showers will sure to follow. At least, they will until and unless global climate changes dictate some other seasonal pattern for us.

But let’s turn from these gloomy matters to the subject of beer, a topic likely to lift our collective mood. I was eating lunch today and being entertained by my wife’s nuanced and dramatic reading of The Dawson Pedigree by Dorothy L. Sayers when we were interrupted by a loud crash from some other part of the house. A quick search did not disclose its cause, and it remained a mystery until shortly afterwards when a pleasant yeasty smell of spilled beer led me to the hot-water heater closet. There I found the scattered shards of a shattered bottle that until the explosion had contained 24 liquid ounces of rather good ESB, now soaking slowly into the woodwork.

I report this at the risk of depressing our collective mood again, but we can all take heart from the fact that over four-and-a-half gallons of ESB remain, unexploded and ready for drinking.

It was my friend, neighbor and fellow Sophisticated Peasant, Wally, who inspired me by his example to resume home-brewing this winter. He also re-awakened my bread-baking zeal by sharing a loaf of his no-knead bread, which was just fabulous. Suffice to say I have been no-kneading ever since and Wally got my extra raspberry canes by way of thanks. He should have a crop of berries this July.

Digging up those extra raspberry canes in February was made needlessly more difficult than it should have been on account of the considerable depth of soggy grape skins I had to slosh through while digging. Since I was the one who put them there you might say it was my fault, but I blame Ruth Stout.

About grape-pressing time last fall I unearthed my old copy of How to Have a Green Thumb Without an Aching Back and regained my enthusiasm for deep-mulching, a sure-fire way (says Ruth) to eliminate weeding and digging, and nourish your soil through sheet-composting at the same time. So when the tiny winery Les Copains supplied me with six garbage cans of grape skins, I decided that, rather than composting them in my usual way, I would spread them all over the garden beds and pathways with a liberal hand.

The trouble is, squeeze-dried grape skins desire nothing more than to re-hydrate themselves. In fact they re-hydrate in preference to decomposing, with the result that the winter rains turned my garden into something like a Jell-o wrestling pit. It’s soggy and squishy out there and looks likely to remain so.

I’ve learned my lesson. The spent hops from beer-brewing go into the compost bin. Likewise the grains of barley. They were malted. They were cracked and mashed. They were thoroughly sparged, and now they’ll be composted and supply yet more good organic material for the soil I’m about to engage with shovel in hand. Believe me when I say I’m ready. – Ian Taylor

Kids Wanted for Fun in Children’s Garden

The former swimming pool area that gave life to our Children’s Garden was relatively quiet over the winter, but it has burst to life again this spring.

Kids and their parents are invited to sign up now for Children’s Garden classes and summer camps. The popular summer sessions often are full by late spring, so early registration is encouraged. Last year we began children’s events in Issaquah, which return in May with an expanded program. All programs other than Issaquah are held at our Children’s Garden at the Good Shepherd Center in Wallingford.

Monday Morning Fun for Everyone

Parents and children ages 2-5 years learn about the garden together in our Monday Mornings in the Children’s Garden programs. These 90-minute classes invite everyone to explore the worm bins, plant seeds, use tools and have fun learning about nature in the garden. They’re offered weekly April 13 - June 8 and Sept. 14 - Oct. 12. Each class is one morning, 10-11:30 a.m. Cost: $20 members/$30 non-members, with parent.

Family Classes in Issaquah

Children’s Harvests return to the Pickering Barn in Issaquah this spring. These parent/tot classes are a great way to introduce children to the wonder of garden ecology. Our theme-based classes offer hands-on fun. Children’s Harvests take place on select Wednesday mornings May 20 - Oct. 7. Each class is one morning, 10 a.m.-noon in Issaquah. Cost: $20 members/$30 non-members, ages 2 to 5 years with parent.

Summer Adventure Day Camps

Enjoy summer at the Children’s Garden! Now is the time to register for our popular summer camp programs, where children join us for fun garden adventures, crafts, songs and games, while spending time outdoors and learning how to grow a garden. Children of any age can participate: there are “Peawee” classes for toddlers and parents, two-day morning programs for preschoolers and parents, half- and full-day camps for grade schoolers, and a Junior Counselor program for youth ages 10-14. Summer camps are held weekdays, June 15 - Sept. 4; fees vary.

For more information, or to join the fun-loving team of volunteer tour leaders, contact Lisa Taylor at (206) 633-0451, ext. 105 or lisataylor@seattletilth.org. Class signups can be done online at our Website, under the Learn tab.
Membership and Donations

- New Member
- Renewing Member
- New contact information?

Name(s) ___________________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________________
City/State/Zip _________________________________________________
Phone _____________________________________________________
E-mail _____________________________________________________

Membership levels

- $35 Regular
- $60 Supporter
- $125 Sustaining
- $250 Patron
- $550 Lifetime
- $20 Limited Income

Yes, I would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support Seattle Tilth operations.
$________ per O Month O Year O Check O Charge
Card # ______________________________________  Exp  __________
Name on card  _______________________________________________

Maritime Northwest Garden Guide
For an indispensable regional guide to year-round gardening enclose $19.50 (includes tax and postage) per copy. Please send me ____ copies.
Mail to Seattle Tilth, 4649 Sunnyside Ave N, Room 120, Seattle, Washington 98103

Navigating Seattle's New Food, Yard Waste Collection

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Q: Is it prohibited to put food in the garbage?
A: Unlike Seattle’s prohibition on recycling in the trash, there is not currently a ban on food in the garbage. However, Seattleites sent 45,000 tons of food waste to the landfill last year. With the new system, much of it can be diverted to Cedar Grove Composting to be turned into valuable compost to improve our soil.

Q: I’ve been wanting to start food waste composting at home, and this gives me the push I need. How do I do it?
A: City-subsidized green cones or home-built wooden worm bins are two of the most popular methods. For purchasing information, building plans and lots of tips, call us or visit our Web site.

Q: I already have yard waste collection. Do I need to do anything?
A: No. But with weekly collection, you may choose to opt for a smaller cart. Carts are available in 13, 32 and 36 gallon sizes. Note that you are no longer allowed a free extra bundle alongside the cart, so factor this in to your planning. You can still put extra yard waste out for an additional fee.

Q: Will my apartment building have food waste collection?
A: Apartment and condo buildings can subscribe to the same system available to single-family households. If your apartment has not been getting food waste collection, talk with your building manager about subscribing.

Q: How can I keep odors and flies down in my home and around the cart?
A: Keeping the food in an airtight or mostly-airtight container in the kitchen can do wonders. While some households keep these containers on the counter or under the sink, others keep the food in the fridge or freezer until taking it out to the cart.

Washing the container between fillings helps with odor. You can choose to line the container (or at least the bottom) with newspaper, paper bags or purchased compostable bags if you wish to keep it even cleaner. Do not use milk cartons as containers; rinse and recycle these instead, as their plastic liners do not break down in the composting process.

You can dump the food straight into your curbside cart either right before collection day or throughout the week, but for longer-lasting odor control, consider putting leaves or newspaper on the bottom of the cart, or wrapping food waste in paper bags or newspaper. Covering the top layer of food in the cart (with newspaper, leaves, etc.) as you would cover food in a worm bin also will help to keep fruit fly populations down. Wash the container periodically to help reduce odors, dumping the dirty water on a lawn or gravel area, not into a storm drain.

Q: With all of this food waste out of my garbage, I have hardly any garbage left!
A: Great! You can downsize to a smaller garbage can by contacting SPU. Along with these changes in food waste collection is an increase in items that can now go into your recycling bin. You may find that the size of your garbage can is no longer appropriate for your needs.

You can find more information as well as great visual aids to what is and is not garbage at the SPU Website; click on links to recycling, yard waste and garbage on their services page: www.ci.seattle.wa.us/util/services/. We can also help you navigate the changes if you give us a call on the Garden Hotline, (206) 633-0224 or visit www.gardenhotline.org.
Get Growing—Take a Class!

Anticipating our biggest event of the year—the annual Edible Plant Sale on May 2 and 3—a number of adult gardening classes are being held in this spring.

Basic class listings are below. They are held either at the Good Shepherd Center (GSC), 4649 Sunnyside Ave. N., in north Seattle, Bradner Gardens Park (BGP), 1733 Bradner Place S., in south Seattle, or at Pickering Barn (PBI), 1730 10th Ave. N.W., Issaquah. Lower price listings are exclusive-ly for Seattle Tilth members, higher prices for the general public. Advance registration and payment are required.

Class details and registration forms are found on our Web site, www.seattletilth.org, under the Learn tab, or can be gained by calling the Tilth office at (206) 633-0451, ext. 101.

Choosing the Right Home Composting System for You
April 4, 10 a.m.-noon, GSC
$25 / $35

Starting With Baby Chicks
April 11, 10 a.m.–12:30 p.m., GSC
$30/$40

Container Veggie Gardening
April 15, 7–9 p.m., PBI
$25 / $35

Container Veggie Gardening
April 16, 7–9 p.m., BGP
$25 / $35

Biointensive Gardening: Grow the Most in a Small Space
April 19, 10 a.m.—noon, GSC
$25 / $35

City Chickens 101
April 25, 10 a.m.–12:30 p.m., GSC
$30 / $40

Conserving Resources: Sun, Rain & Soil
April 20, BGP and April 25, GSC (2-parts)
$45/$55

**Take a Class During Our Edible Plant Sale**

**Container Veggie Gardening**
May 2, 10–11 a.m.
$12 / $18

1,2,3 Grow a Garden
May 2, noon–1 p.m.
$12 / $18

**Container Veggie Gardening**
May 3, 11 a.m.–noon
$12 / $18

1,2,3 Grow a Garden
May 3, noon–1 p.m.
$12 / $18

Biointensive Gardening: Grow the Most in a Small Space
April 19, 10 a.m.—noon, GSC
$25 / $35

Growing Great Tomatoes and Other Heat Crops
May 9, 10 a.m.—noon, GSC
$25 / $35

Starting with Baby Chicks
May 16, 10 a.m.—12:30 p.m., GSC
$30/$40

City Goats 101
May 16, 1:30-4 p.m., GSC
$30/$40

Vertical Gardening
May 17, 2-4 p.m., GSC
$25/$35