

## Scavenging For Food Scraps

By Sophie Braccini



Bart Carr and Lois Courchaine check a green bin for food scraps

Photo Sophie Braccini

On a chilly Lafayette morning, three individuals were roaming Rohrer Drive in Lafayette, one armed with what looked like a long bent screw driver, one carrying a notepad, the third a camera. It was trash collection day and the trio was going from one green recycling trash bin to the next, digging in whole-heartedly, inspecting, sniffing and commenting.

An older gentleman came out of his house and asked, "May I help you?" "Hi," replied the tall gentleman in the group, "We represent the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority (CCCSWA) and we are checking the recycling bins to see how many people are recycling their food scraps. My name is Bart Carr, and this is Lois Courchaine from CCCSWA." The third person was a certain nosy reporter, who wanted to see first hand how the program was doing.

The "Food Scrap Recycling program" started in Lamorinda at the beginning of September, when small gray plastic containers were distributed to all residents along with the "Does and Don'ts" of food scrap recycling. According to Carr, "The program aims at two objectives, first to diminish the amount of trash that is sent to land fill, since about 20% of our trash is made of food scraps; and second is to minimize the amount of food that goes down the drains, because the more food there is in our drains the harder it is to treat that water and greater the risk of clogging."

At two months into program, CCCSWA decided to audit the response of the community. In Alameda County, a similar program has

been in effect for years and the rate of homeowners recycling food scraps is about 30%.

So when they started on their trash-digging journey, Carr and Courchaine didn't have their hopes too high. Lafayette was the first town tested, and the results were amazing: 37% of all green bins checked included food scraps. Ron Zuckerman, on Rohrer, was out gardening when the "trash police trio" came by. "We love this program," said Zuckerman, "we don't use the gray bin, we put our scrap in a paper bag when we prepare food or clean up and directly dump it into our tall green bin. Now our blue can never overflows anymore." Bart Carr told him that for a two-person home, a twenty gallon blue bin should now be enough and would save him an additional \$5 on his garbage bill. Susan Manzano of Lafayette uses big paper bags too, "We are a seven-person family," she said, "plus a dog, but I understand that no manure goes into that program!"

The following week it was Moraga's turn. The inspection started on Calle La Mesa, and right from the start the result was jaw-dropping: 54% of all trash cans contained food scraps. George Atashkarian, a local recycler, commented, "It is so easy, and it seems the right thing to do." As the group encountered other Moragans who reported issues with fruit flies and even maggots, Carr offered advice: "If you are concerned with odors and flies, you may want to stay away from meat and dairy products and just put vegetable and fruit scraps in your bin. You want to empty your bin frequently; it literally takes days for any larvae to develop, so you should never get them. You may also use paper grocery bags to enclose food, keeping smells in and flies out. Since paper is biodegradable, it can be composted with the food and yard scraps."

The amazing Moraga rate was not matched by Orinda the following week during the third trash voyage. But Orindans held their own with a very respectable 28%. There too, the residents that the trio met in the streets were amicable. Marcie Tuttle, who was walking with a friend, was particularly positive. "I have that little container right there on my counter," she said, "and I fill it up whenever I prepare food. I was born in California and was raised saving water, this too is a way to save water, you don't have to waste so much using the disposal all the time."

At the end of the audit both Carr and Courchaine were pleased by the results. They plan to promote the program some more around Thanksgiving so fewer leftovers, bones and other food scraps end up in the trash. "These numbers are very reassuring," concluded Courchaine, "and we didn't take into account the fact that many times we couldn't dig very deep into the bin, because we didn't want to make a mess. So we probably missed some recycled food scraps at the bottom."



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