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## Local Residents Learn Importance of Composting

By Sophie Braccini



Students look for all of the different, very small bugs within different compost samples. Stephen Andrews is on the left. Photo Ashley Louisiana

Now that most everyone knows how to use their black, blue and green trash bins, the agency that manages local garbage, RecycleSmart, has a new aim: getting users to think seriously about composting.

“Source reduction” is the new buzzword in the trash world, meaning that residents should consider reducing the amount of waste going into their curbside carts, and put it to use in their yards. To promote the concept, RecycleSmart has enrolled 14 residents in a seven-week Advanced Composting Series to become CompostSMART Instructors and spread the word.

RecycleSmart Waste Prevention and Compost Manager Ashley Louisiana said that participants in the workshop were visually and verbally instructed on how to train others, present information and simplify the vast topic of home composting.

“CompostSMART cultivates an enthusiastic core of knowledgeable individuals who will expand public interest, education and the practice of home composting in the RecycleSmart service area,” she said.

Four residents from Lamorinda signed up to come for four hours over seven weekends to be part of this first class. It was led by Stephen Andrews, a UC Berkeley professor who has had contracts with many composting-related industries in the Bay Area.

Orinda’s Rachel Lorenz said that the class included lectures on the scientific and technical aspects of composting and vermicomposting, as well as demonstrations, several hands-on exercises and a field trip.

“I’m a UC Master Gardener of Contra Costa County,” she said. “The Advanced Compost training program reinforced my understanding of the importance of soil health and the role it plays in the health of our garden plants.” Feed the soil, not the plant is the rule she goes by.

Lafayette’s Judy Ryan, also a Master Gardener in the program, said that the content was very am-

bitious, that they needed additional time to cover the material and that the future classes will be extended by a couple of weeks.

RecycleSmart is set to reach the state 2020 goal of 75 percent trash diversion. The agency explains that home composting plays an important role in efforts to divert organics. It is the most efficient and least costly diversion practice, since the system is managed at home.

Lorenz is on board to help reduce waste from the source; she is convinced that composting at home is a great way to do that, adding that she now serves as a trainer.

“I am better able to discuss and teach others about the how’s and why’s of composting,” she said, noting that her ability to compost in her own backyard has improved dramatically, to the point that her green “organics” bin goes mostly unused.

Ryan has also been using her new knowledge at home, where she has three regular bins and two worm bins.

RecycleSmart offers several programs to support the effort of source reduction under the name “Home Composting for Busy People,” including CompostSMART once a year, and free ongoing workshops, such as Vermicomposting and Bin Building workshops. The agency provides low-cost compost bins, free brochures and informational materials. It also offers the Home Composter Certification program for a monthly garbage bill discount.

RecycleSmart’s next large group targets are businesses and multi-family residences. Louisiana says that RecycleSmart started the “Mandatory Commercial Organics Recycling Act” April 1 with a requirement for all businesses and apartments that generate eight cubic yards or more of organics per week to recycle their organics.

“There will be follow-up requirements for all businesses and apartments to recycle their organics by 2020,” she added. RecycleSmart offers their organics services at no additional costs.

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