

Title: Community Compost Education Project 2012

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Cooperator(s):

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Abstract: Unnecessary pesticide use not only increases human exposure but also increases potential impact on ground water quality. Consumers using IPM practices and compost as a soil amendment can decrease pesticide use. Compost can improve growing conditions for plants (plants that grow well are less susceptible to insect pests) as well as improve soil nutrient and water holding capacity reducing potential runoff so fertilizers and pesticides are less likely to end up in lakes and streams.

In 2012 CCE Wayne County staff and volunteers utilized various outreach methods including workshops, a presentation to a water quality group, demonstrations and distribution of fact sheet sets to increase public awareness of IPM practices and use of compost to improve soil structure.

Over 1000 people received information about composting with 106 adults, who received fact sheet packets, completing an IPM/Composting survey and signing a pledge to protect themselves, the environment and plants from pests and pesticides. Additionally we distributed 5 wire composting bins for youth to use when learning about IPM and composting with 58 youth completing a survey about IPM and composting.

Background and justification: Wayne County is a rural community with 77% of its population living in/owning their own homes (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/36117.html>). Consumer calls to our gardening hotline indicated that many home gardeners/homeowners struggle with growing healthy plants often due to improper plant siting and poor soil conditions. Some callers also expressed concerns about using too many pesticides. When plants don't grow well and are attacked by various pests many people turn to pesticides for control creating a cycle of pesticide use that may have been avoided or reduced if IPM practices and use of compost to improve soil structure had been known and implemented.

When consumers are made aware of IPM practices, including creating healthy soil, most are interested in learning how they can use IPM practices to grow healthy plants and decrease pesticide use. This interest creates an opportunity for us to help consumers gain a better understanding of IPM methods including use of compost as a soil amendment. Once understood, consumers can better utilize methods to decrease pesticide use around their homes while maintaining plant health and water quality at the same time.

In addition to people who maintain home landscapes and gardens, our youth is another group that could benefit from learning about IPM and composting. Adults working with youth expressed an interest in receiving educational material and presentations to teach youth about environmental stewardship. IPM methods and composting are a good fit with this type of curriculum and introduction to these concepts at a young age may help foster a better understanding and implementation of these practices when they become adults.

Objectives:

1. To educate and involve children at a young age in IPM and teach about composting and how composting fits into the IPM program. (Environmental benefits of composting on plants, soil and our planet).
2. To educate 100 adults about IPM, composting methods and how compost that's used as a soil amendment is a beneficial part of IPM.
3. To evaluate the successfulness of this educational process

7. Procedures:

Objective 1:

- Using 4' tall welded wire we made 5 wire bin composting units that were set up at 5 school/community locations in Wayne County.
- We worked with adult leaders on the concepts of IPM and composting and supplied them with an IPM/ Composting fact sheet set and laminated "Lasagna Composting" mini-poster for reference and for use as a teaching aid.
- We supplied 1 bale of straw at each location where we involved adult leaders and youth in creating "Lasagna Compost" in the wire bin units.

Objective 2: Our objective was to educate a minimum of 100 adults about composting and IPM methods so they would have the opportunity to reduce their pesticide use and improve their soil. To achieve this objective:

- CCE staff compiled an IPM/Composting fact sheet set that included 7 home composting fact sheets along with an IPM fact sheet "Understanding IPM and Implementing IPM at Home". Master Gardener volunteers distributed the fact sheet sets to the clients along with the IPM/Composting survey/pledge after discussing IPM and composting concepts with them.
- A welded wire bin was set up at the CCE Wayne County composting demonstration site, along with "How to - Lasagna Composting" signage.
- Two containers (one amended with compost and one without) were planted with summer squash at our CCE demonstration site and information was posted by the containers so visitors could see the difference between the plants growing in each container.
- 2 e-mails were sent to clients of our CCE Wayne county Master Gardener consumer e-mail service (over 750 clients). The July e-mail included information on the compost workshop and an article written by CCE staff "Use of Compost and IPM methods benefit

Home Gardens and Landscapes”. The August e-mail included information about the workshop.

- An article titled “Use of Compost and IPM methods benefit Home Gardens and Landscapes” was published on the CCE page of the Wayne County Times newspaper in July.
- In August CCE staff sent out a press release advertising the workshop to CCE media contacts.
- CCE staff and Master Gardener volunteers held a Composting and Gardening off the Ground workshop at the CCE Wayne County demonstration site where attendees were introduced to IPM methods that could help reduce pesticide use around their homes including how to create backyard compost to use to improve soil structure. Participants received the IPM/Composting fact sheet set and completed the pre/post workshop survey “How IPM and Compost Benefit Home Environments”.
- In October (post-workshop) an article summarizing the workshop along with a picture of attendees was published on the CCE page of the Wayne County Times newspaper. The article also included information on obtaining IPM/Composting fact sheets sets.
- Master Gardener volunteers used one of the welded wire bin units to conduct compost demonstrations at 2 Wayne County Farmers Markets and at one community garden distributing fact sheet sets at all 3 locations.
- CCE staff created a Composting/IPM display that included welded wire bin with “Lasagna Composting” and “Stealth Composting” unit that was set up at the Wayne County Fair where it was open to the public for the duration of the fair with volunteers staffing the booth on CCE day.
- In December a press release summarizing 2012 accomplishments identifying NYS IPM as a project funding source was sent out.

Objective 3:

- We created and distributed 3 surveys that were completed by respective groups and collected by CCE program staff and Master Gardener volunteers.
- “How IPM and Compost Work Together for Our Environment” for youth at schools/community gardens sites
- A pre/post IPM/Composting workshop survey “How IPM and Compost Benefit Home Environments” for adults attending the workshop and
- “How IPM and Compost Benefit Home Environments” survey for consumers who received the IPM/Composting fact sheet sets.

8. Results and discussion:

As reflected in conversations our Master Gardener Volunteers have with consumers, some consumers are aware of the negative impact the overuse of pesticides and fertilizer can have while others make random applications without considering potential impacts on human health and the environment. Both groups could benefit from being aware of methods that help mitigate these impacts while creating healthier environments for people and plants. Wayne County is located in the Great Lakes basin and methods consumers use to care for their lawns, gardens and landscape plants can potentially impact these areas too.

It's also important that these concepts are introduced to our youth. If we can expose youth to the concepts of composting and IPM in school or community gardens, they will hopefully learn more about and implement composting and IPM as adults.

As a result of this project, IPM/Composting fact sheet packets were distributed to 132 consumers with 106 completing and returning the survey/pledge stating that they will use what they learned to protect themselves, the environment and their plants from pests and pesticides. Master Gardener volunteers working on our gardening hotline advised an additional 208 consumers using IPM based recommendations for pest control and suggestions for alternative actions, including soil amendments that could help decrease reoccurrence of the problem in the future. Additionally, fifty-eight youth at 5 locations learned about IPM and composting and completed surveys about it. Information on the workshop and an article "Use of Compost and IPM methods benefit Home Gardens and Landscapes" were sent out to 750 contacts who receive our monthly gardening and home grounds information through our Master Gardener e-mail service. The article was also published in the Wayne County Times- official paper for Wayne County- with circulation of over 12000 and in the Wayne Post - a local town paper. The fact sheet packets will remain available to consumers on an ongoing basis and in 2013 we will contact at least 3 additional community/school garden sites about teaching IPM and composting and provide wire compost units and signage at those sites.

9. Project location(s):

5 Wire bin compost units for youth: Lyons Community Garden, Clyde School (21st Century Program), Wayne Central School (classroom project), CCE Demonstration Garden, Newark- (4H group), The Tot Spot Daycare Center – Ontario, NY

Distribution of fact sheet sets: Wayne County, NY

10. Samples of resources developed: (if applicable)

Please see attachments:

Lasagna Composting Poster – scanned copy

Stealth Composting Poster- scanned copy

"Benefits of Compost" Poster for container display

"Guidelines for Prudent Composting" poster – for CCE Demo garden

Fact Sheet Set – 1 each of 8 fact sheets: "Lasagna Composting"; "Compost Troubleshooting"; "Compost Basics and Benefits"; "Stealth Composting"; "Winter Composting"; "Is it Done Yet"; "Welded Wire Bin"; "Understanding IPM and Implementing IPM at Home"

Surveys – 1 each of 3 surveys: "How IPM and Compost Benefit Home Environments" for adults attending the workshop; "How IPM and Compost Benefit Home Environments" survey for

consumers who received the IPM/Composting fact sheet sets; “How IPM and Compost Work Together for Our Environment” for youth at schools/community gardens sites.

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