Auraria Compost Outpost

Frequently Asked Questions

- What is compost?
  - *“Composting is a controlled, aerobic (oxygen-required) process that converts organic materials into a nutrient-rich soil amendment or mulch through natural decomposition.” - EPA*
  - *The nutrient-rich value of compost as a soil amendment enhances soil fertility, reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers and improves water retention when applied. Utilizing this fertile compost on AHEC soils will be pivotal in revitalizing our campus trees, plants, and grasses.*

- What is an In-vessel?
  - *An in-vessel composter is a composting method that utilizes a drum, concrete trench, or similar equipment. In general, in-vessel composters represent a closed system, enabling precise regulation of temperature, moisture, and oxygen flow for organic matter. Due to their enclosed design and meticulous control, they typically exhibit shorter processing times and reduced potential for leachate and odor issues.*

- How much can the Auraria in-vessel composter process?
  - *The M4 can handle 132 Gal, 937 Lbs., 0.7 Yds, 0.5 t daily.*

- How long does it take for the material to be processed?
  - *The M4 can process compost in 24-72 hours. The composting process will continue outside the unit for another 3-6 months, allowing it to mature.*

- What will you do with the final product?
  - *The final product will be used as a soil amendment and alternative fertilizers for landscaping around campus.*

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- What can be composted on campus now?
  - *Organic waste such as grass trimmings, leaves, and branches and food waste such as banana peels, apple cores, and coffee grounds. Also, single-use to-go service ware that is BPI certified can be composted. Please ensure an item has a third-party certification symbol before putting it in the compost.*

- How do I know if something is compostable?
  - *Any organic material is compostable; this includes yard trimmings, food, peels, eggshells, seeds, and pits, etc. To know if a manufactured product is compostable, look for a symbol signifying that it is "BPI Certified." These symbols are the most common ones to look for:*

- What will happen when there's a big influx of compost material?
  - *Fortunately, our composting unit has about three times the capacity necessary for day-to-day compost volume. This means that if there's a larger than usual amount of compostable material coming through on a given day (for example, from a large, food-oriented event on campus), we can process it. However, if there is too much material at a given time, we will sort through the material to pull out any contaminants and send the clean material to an industrial-level composting facility such as A1 Organics.*

- What happens when there are non-compostable materials in the compost bins?
  - *We've done our best to set up a system that will reduce contamination in the compost stream but understand that we can't expect to have zero contamination in our front-facing bins. After we collect all compostable material across campus, we bring it to our on-campus sorting yard where employees pull out all the non-compostable items before putting the material into the composting unit. Unfortunately, if there is too much contamination for our staff to sort out, that given load will go to the landfill.*

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- Why is composting important/how does it relate to sustainability?
    - *Food that nourishes our bodies and helps us stay healthy is grown from nutrient-dense soil to feed us and support our local economy. To establish a natural cycle, it is crucial to recycle our food waste, creating nutrient-rich compost to replenish and amend our soils for the growth of plants, trees, and grasses. Adding compost to the land fosters a more resilient ecological system, reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers, helping soil retain water, preventing erosion, and sequestering carbon. Composting organic waste also diverts organic food and yard waste from landfills, where it would otherwise sit in plastic-lined pits, decomposing via anaerobic digestion, with the emitted byproduct being CH4 (methane gas), a greenhouse gas 30-80 times more potent than CO2 (carbon dioxide).*

- Where else are there compost operations like this one?
    - *While the Auraria Campus is the first in the state to take on full operations (including hauling and sorting), other campuses and institutions have in-vessel composting units like ours! Some nearby include Denver Public Schools, Western State College, Fort Lewis College, and Poudre School District. Similar models are also used at Grand Canyon National Park and Microsoft Headquarters.*

To learn more about the history of composting on the Auraria Campus, please visit ***sustainableauraria.com/compost*** *or contact Cassy Cadwallader (cadwalladerc@ahec.edu).*

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