

Being a Basic Participant with Back2Earth

Composting is not rocket science, but there are definitely ways for it to go wrong. Joining Back2Earth will give you everything you need to compost your organic waste safely, cleanly, and confidently. Learn to nail the basics and support the process with fellow composters.

Sorting & Adding Material

A printed guide for your kitchen will tell you what you can and cannot send to the compost pile and a convenient kitchen pail will hold it for you while you're prepping produce or cleaning up dishes. Once your pail is full, bring it to the compost area and another guide will show you each step of using the equipment and covering your materials to make it smell and pest free. All you need to do is follow along, and ask if you have questions!

Be Sharp & Communicative

To help keep the process functioning well for everyone, an attentive eye and a readiness to reach out will help prevent small issues from becoming big ones. Making sure the equipment is maintained, locks and tools are replaced and secured, the compost is contaminant-free, and that exceptions are reported are essential to a successful outcome. Letting any of these things wander too far may seem small but could result in serious problems for the whole operation.

Going the Extra Mile

If you're ready for a little more engagement, you can sign up to be a Turner and help mix the compost, or receive the advanced compost training to be eligible to be a Site Lead. Even talking to your Turners and Site Lead to see if they need help or have suggestions will go a long way in making the program work well for everyone.

Being a Turner with Back2Earth

Being a turner is an easy way for a little effort to go a long way. The chemistry of compost is such that it needs to be “mixed up” about once a week to keep a number of factors balanced. Doing it takes about 10 - 15 minutes, and consists of opening up the bin and using the provided pitchfork to move the material. There should be around 1 turner signed up for every 5 participants so the coverage can be rotated and shared.

How to Turn

“Inside-Out”: A compost pile has 2 sides- the inside, and the outside, and the goal is to try to get them to switch. There is no exact way to do it, but one easy method is to dig one corner onto the top of another, then use that free space like a slider puzzle to shift material around in sections from the inside to the edges, and from edge to inside.

Breaking up: it’s good to “toss” and jostle the material around a bit as it’s moved to loosen up anything that has clumped together. This is just as important as turning inside-out, because each clump is essentially its own “inside” that needs to be broken out.

When to Turn

Rotation: The task needs to be performed weekly and will be rotated between turners. The exact schedule can be arranged by the turners and adjusted as participation changes.

Turning window: To ensure that a roughly equal amount of time passes between each turn, a ‘turning day’ should be determined. A +/- one day window is fine, but any more will be too inconsistent for a reliable result. If no other window is arranged, Fri/Sat/Sun is the default.

Role Considerations

Communication: Be sure to be in touch with your site lead and other turners about any problems that come up while turning. Damaged equipment, or problems in the compost should be indicated to make sure that each is corrected.

Absence Coverage: If you are unable to turn your given week, be sure to reach out to the other turners to try to set up a replacement. If no one is available, be sure to let the site lead know.

Move Out/End of Participation: Once you know you will no longer be serving as a turner, be sure to give the site lead notice so that the site can adapt and continue to operate smoothly.

Going the extra Mile

Since you will be seeing the compost up close, you will have the best opportunity to make a quick inspection to ensure everything is looking alright. Keeping an eye on the following items and communicating with the site lead will be a tremendous help in ensuring a successful result:

- Compost Contamination (non-compostable or prohibited items)
- Signs of pests (burrowing or chewing)
- Pile imbalance (stinky, sludgy, or crumbly)
- Equipment neglect (missing/damaged tools, locks not secured)

B2E

Being a Site Lead with Back2Earth

The Site Lead is an essential role in the Back2Earth program. It is connectivity, expertise, and support. It is an opportunity to become experienced in composting or practice the existing skill, to connect to your housing community, and to support organics diversion from the landfill.

Function

Compost Expert: While all participants will be trained on sorting and adding material, not all will know what signs to monitor and adjustments to make to maintain a successful process. This role assures that there is a participant on site with the knowledge to make corrections or guiding decisions as needed.

Information Repository: Site leads can quickly provide reference information to participants and field basic questions on program operation for new or newly-interested participants.

Liaison: The Back2Earth program is about collective operation and involves both residents and program staff. The site lead represents the site and communicates about questions or needs with the program staff.

Responsibilities

- Check the compost area about once a week (when additions are made) to monitor for pile heath, contamination, and equipment condition.
- Address recurring equipment or pile issues by messaging participants.
- Use material additions to adjust browns/greens balance as needed.
- Field participant questions on program operation.
- Meet with program staff once a month during the partner period to discuss program performance and provide feedback.
- Relay any material, equipment, or support needs to program staff between site visits.

Extra Mile Support

Site leads are directly supported by program staff and can ask questions, request information, request an additional site visit, or make program suggestions at any time. Site leads have already gone the extra mile and their input is essential to the success of the operation.

Role Considerations

Engagement: The role will require a certain commitment, particularly when the site first starts. It is difficult to estimate but may take around 30 minutes per week for the first month or two.

Absence Coverage: For an absence greater than 2 weeks, a substitute will be needed to cover the duties, and B2E program staff should be informed.

Move Out/End of Participation: Once you know you will no longer be serving as site lead, be sure to give notice to program staff so that the role can be transferred and continue to operate.

B2E