

# It's International Compost Awareness Week



**Blair Houtz**  
Guest columnist

In celebration of International Compost Awareness Week, I'm rehashing some local composting options and including one which often goes unrecommended; perhaps because it's borderline illegal. Like myself, many of you might not be familiar with International Compost Awareness Week but apparently it's been a thing for almost as long as me— started by the Composting Council of Canada in 1995. Some of you might not even know what composting is, and I'd love to break it down for you here; but with a limited word count and a desire to convince you to start composting, I will rather refer you to the New Hanover County Extension Office website (<https://newhanover.ces.ncsu.edu/2021/05/may-2-8th-is-compost-awareness-week/>) for the what and how. I will focus instead on the why and where.

Composting has been a focus of my company Boot Scrap since late 2019 when we first reached out to Riley Alber of Wilmington Compost Company in hopes of a collaboration which could divert the organic waste created by our local film studio, Screen Gems. Alber taught us all about the science and significance of taking garbage and transforming it to grow gardens. Months later, he connected us to a team of bright green minds in need of video content as they started a composting and gardening program at Winter Park Elementary School. A year later, and now that program — called Garbage to Gardens — is spreading to a number of other schools in the county. It teaches kids about their waste: where it's going, where it could be going, and how they can even use it to grow their own food in the future. To be honest, other than the innate joy of playing in dirt and a learned appreciation for microorganisms, the message doesn't initially resonate with every kid; but that's understandable. Saving tax dollars and the planet are acquired tastes. That is, composting will not only save us weight in our trash bags and

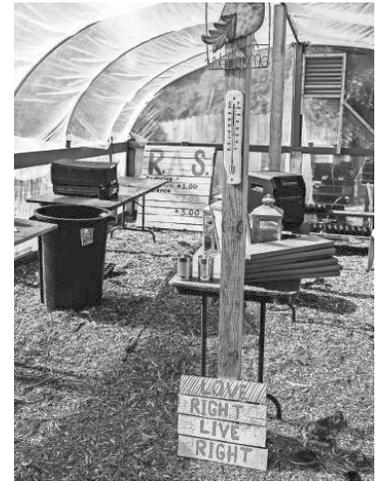


**Composting decreases food waste.** PHOTOS COURTESY OF GARION WORLDSLAYER

space in our landfill but will also help with stormwater mitigation, carbon sequestration, and vegetation health on the backend. And all you really have to do is throw your organic waste into a different container than your trash can. If you can, you should store your food waste in a freezer to keep the scraps odorless and from attracting any pests to your home.

So, you start with separating your organic waste; now, what are your options? Essentially, here there's four. You

can sign up for Wilmington Compost Company's residential pickup service, use the county's compost collection program at the landfill (there's also a mobile collection service called the "Hazwagon" for this program), start your own backyard compost, or — fourth but possibly foremost — take your scraps to a nearby community garden. I want to encourage the use of community gardens here because not only is it perhaps the most convenient and sustainable, but also surely the most thera-



**You can compost at home.**

peutic of our options. You can decrease your food waste, participate in a garden and community, and even grab some lunch from the earth while you're there. Yet, a city policy for community gardens in 2015 actually prohibited the dumping of household food scraps due to odor and pests. In reality, that's only a problem if the compost pile is mismanaged. Proper mixing and turning should prevent these undesirables. Quite contrary to this old city recommendation, composting should be a requirement at our community gardens and, further, the dumping of our communities' household organic waste should be incentivized — especially for the food-deserted populations of downtown. It is a sad truth that many community gardens, especially in such areas, have become defunct over the years; but it's a happy truth that in soil there's always life and in a community there's always hope. A community itself is a garden, of course; only needing some Love and resources, like compost, to thrive.

*Blair Houtz is a producer for the local As Sustainable As Possible production company Boot Scrap, which collaborates with the Arboretum for videos, events, and community outreach. The Arboretum, 6206 Oleander Drive, Wilmington is free and open daily from 8 a.m.-5 p.m.*