

Compost Availability – 2020 Season *A note from the Recycling Coordinator:*

UPDATED 6-17-20

Hi, I serve as Bethlehem's Recycling Coordinator and one of the primary managers of the Town's Compost Facility, along with our new Highway Superintendent Marc Dorsey, who I'm pleased to share has been incredibly supportive of the Town's Compost Facility and program.

I wanted to start by thanking all the residents and other town officials who has been supportive of the Town's composting program and facility over the years, and more recently.

As you may be aware, we have experienced an unprecedented level of interest and activity, shoveling and sales at the compost facility this spring--by far the busiest I've seen in the decade I've been with the Town.

It's exciting to see this much interest in our compost and wood mulch, and in gardening and landscaping... and also, it has been challenging to manage, since we hadn't predicted this would occur when planning last year for the spring opening of the compost season.

We've already completely run out of our leaf compost (temporarily; we have more in process, but it's not fully composted yet). I'm hoping we'll have more ready by late summer, or at the latest, early fall in time to enrich your garden beds during the peak growing season as needed, and/or to help put them to bed for the winter. I always recommend composting in the fall as well as prior to and/or during the growing season.

We have also completely run out of our light wood mulch (unfortunately this product is usually only made once/year from the logs and wood chips we take in from the Town's tree work the previous fall and winter), and now in mid-June we have also run out of our dark wood mulch.

For these three products, I don't mean we have any reserved or set aside--I mean we are completely out of them for the time being until more can be made, which includes Mother Nature's timetable for the next batch of leaf compost to be ready. Between the hundreds of shovelers per week and the sales of loaded material to both residents and contractors (often 1-2 yards at a time for the loaded material... though shovelers sometimes will do an entire pickup truck or even trailer at a time, since the shoveling limit per resident has been extremely generous—4 cubic yards per week). If the budget allows for it someday, it would interesting to have a "compost cam" set up so folks can watch from home just how busy we've been, often with multiple vehicles arriving at once, and lines to the shack where our attendant provides direction or sales to folks, and several households shoveling simultaneously.

Regarding our screened compost, we now have more available for shoveling, in addition to sales of purchased material. I apologize that we needed to temporarily restrict this from shoveling. Large quantities had disappeared through shoveling this spring and through sales (mostly 1-2 cubic yards at a time), and a large bulk purchase had been reserved by a commercial customer that is doing a soil reclamation project. They had already paid for that pile, and we needed to restrict shoveling in order to assure that we had adequate supply while they were hauling the many trips, which takes some time.

With loaded material, we can control quantities that are sold and quantities left available. But quantities that are taken through resident shoveling cannot be easily controlled or restricted without completely roping off a pile from shoveling. I've watched dozens of cubic yards disappear through shoveling within a matter of minutes when there are a lot of households shoveling at once.

For those who wish to shovel free material, we now have more of our classic screened compost prepared and ready—though I can't promise how long that will last in this extremely unusual year we've been having! So I ask for patience and understanding please with our staff and with fellow residents.

For those who wish to pay the resident rates for loaded Screened Compost, it's \$20/cubic yard, which is 27 cubic feet and a good amount of material for the cost.

Brand new this season we also have Full Circle Food Scraps enhanced screened compost, which has more available nutrients for plants than our traditional yard-waste-only screened compost. I recommend this product for your vegetable gardens (or some flowers/plants as well, depending on your current soil conditions). This is available ONLY to residents initially, as we have very limited quantities thus far—though we'll be making more. This is available through purchase of a resident punch card for \$20, which allows you to shovel 30 gallons of this very rich material in your own containers, or if you prefer the convenience, we have some already bagged material while supplies last—you get three 40-lb bags per punch card. We were able to bag this material for free during an equipment demonstration, thanks to the kind folks at Rotochopper, which is why we currently only have a very limited quantity of the bagged product.

Please be aware that we have *always* done a combination of bulk sales to contractors and individual sales and shoveling for residents. While we like to provide free material for residents to shovel, the sales are what keeps our expensive operations going, especially with current construction costs for expanding the facility (see below).

And we have run out of some of our products in previous years as well, just not quite this early in the season! The difference this year are the twin forces of unprecedented levels of shoveling and sales, and more budget constraints on the Town budget than ever before. The budget situation is a combination of reduced revenue from the pandemic, as everyone is probably painfully aware, and construction expansion of our compost facility for the first time in over 20 years.

As anyone who has been down there lately has probably noticed, we have had the good fortune to move forward with a much-needed expansion and upgrade of the facility. Each year we collect more yard waste and leaves, and have been running out of space to process the material. We have also successfully piloted and are scaling up to a full program for food scraps composting, in order to successfully divert up to 30% of our waste stream from the landfill, produce superior enhanced compost products, and gain much needed revenue.

These expansions of the paved pad, purchase of new equipment and installation of electricity will all help keep the facility serving the Town well into the future. And while we've gratefully received generous matching grants from DEC for equipment, electricity installation, and paved pad expansion, we still need to fund the local match, and our sales of compost is one of the best ways to address these costs.

Thanks again for everyone's support, and I appreciate your patience (and safe social distancing) at our compost facility--especially this year!

If anyone has other questions about our compost products or operations, please email me at drain@townofbethlehem.org.

Stay safe,
Dan Lilkas-Rain
Recycling Coordinator