

Grants Reward Composting Creativity

By [Tara MacIsaac](#) On March 21, 2011 @ 11:13 am In [New York City](#) | [No Comments](#)

NEW YORK—Care for a cup of compost tea? One East Village school is using organic waste to power a tea-brewer, creating a delightful cup of eco-friendly chai.

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SCRAPS TO SOIL: Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer awards grants to local organizations to get the borough composting on a grand scale. (Pheobe Zheng/The Epoch Times)

Microbes and bacteria that feed on the compost emit heat, as does the oxidizing process (an interaction between nitrogen, carbon, and oxygen in the waste heap). A copper coil can be used to harness the heat and boil the water to make tea.

Boiling water for tea was just one of 23 grant-winning ideas submitted by community gardeners, schools, housing developments, and other groups in Manhattan to expand the borough's composting capacity. The goal is to get more people involved in turning trash

into treasure.

Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and neighborhood-empowerment organization, Citizens Committee for New York City (CCNYC), teamed up to fund creative composting proposals. Stringer pledged \$750 grants for half of the winners, and CCNYC matched his investment.

Stringer and CCNYC CEO Peter Kostmayer awarded the grants at PS 11 in Chelsea, one of the recipients, on Sunday afternoon.

The sun was shining on the first day of spring, children were running around the

garden, newly sprouted lettuce plants poked green leaves up out of the soil, and PTA Garden Coordinator Lauren Gill explained her plan for making more mulch.

MANHATTAN MULCH



LUSH AND LEAFY: The children at PS 11 have already been feasting on the lettuce from their garden. With a grant for compost, the salads will keep coming. (Pheobe Zheng/The Epoch Times)

The school garden already has two tumbling composts, which afford the children great delight.

“Kids love to compost; parents hate to compost,” noted Gill. Between, “Ew, that's gross!” and, “Whoa, that's awesome!” Gill says the kids are naturally fascinated by the dirty job of composting. It's a good thing, too, because the soil in the garden needs the produced fertilizer to nourish herbs, strawberries, lettuce, and other natural wonders.

Gill recalled that when they first started the garden, “our soil was just about as nutritious as this asphalt we're standing on.” New York City Green Thumb, the city's community garden organization, came to the rescue with about 6 cubic yards of compost. That was a great start, but to keep nutrients in the soil, the little gardeners have to keep making more fertilizer.

Gill plans to use the additional funds to double the school's compost capacity. She hopes to spread the word in the community to get scraps from local businesses and to have more room to turn yard waste into fertilizer.

For urban gardeners in a cement environment, soil is an especially precious resource. Another particular urban challenge can be the smell produced by the waste heaps--in such close quarters, some neighbors do not appreciate the “earthy” scent. If cared for properly, odor should not be a problem, but with an improper balance composts can get a little smelly.

Another grant-winning plan ensures no scent will escape. It involves the implementation of a Japanese composting technique called [Bokashi](#). It uses a special microorganism that does not require oxygen to break down the waste; this allows for a

closed system without insects and without odor. The Bokashi method is able to break down foods often-left out of traditional composts, like meat and cheese.

‘VICIOUS CYCLE’ VS. ‘DELICIOUS CYCLE’

About 17 percent of Manhattan’s trash comprises organic waste, according to Solid Waste Advisory Board Composting Committee Chair Christine Datz-Romero—that is 500 tons of material requiring taxpayer dollars to transport.

Trucks burn fuel to transport this waste to distant landfills, Datz-Romero noted. Once the waste gets there, it produces methane gas. Therefore, two harmful emissions are generated in one shot.

Datz-Romero quoted a reporter from the East Villager, who called the current trash-disposal system a “vicious cycle.” Conversely, he called the compost system a “delicious cycle.”

Stringer's composting initiative also involves establishing an online map to let people locate the closest compost site in their neighborhood .

The City Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse, and Recycling has one composting facility on Staten Island. Most composting in the city depends on local organizations, businesses, and individuals.

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