

The Composter



Solana Center for Environmental Innovation

Winter 2007/08

Vermicomposting in Schools

These days, even worms are going to school, but it's not the worms getting an education -- it's the kids!

The Solana Center has been sending Master Composters into K-6 classrooms in San Diego and Encinitas since 2004 to teach students how to do their own worm composting.

In less than an hour, students learn the basics of worm anatomy, recycling, and vermicomposting. Students love seeing the worms up close, and the classroom

Students love seeing the worms up close, and the classroom rings with laughter every time the word "poop" comes up!

rings with laughter every time the word "poop" comes up!

"We want to make science a living classroom," said Tracy McMillan, 4th-grade teacher at Jerabek Elementary.

McMillan is one of four 4th-grade teachers at the school who are incorporating worm composting into the classroom curriculum.

Students are learning how to make soil healthy and organic to use in their new school garden they'll be installing with

funds from a California Department of Education garden grant. Each grade level will be growing vegetables and herbs this year, with the help of the worms.

"This [composting] is the Cadillac of recycling," said McMillan.

As of December 2007, Solana Center Master Composters have given presentations to over 1,000 students at 20 schools.

A huge "Thank You" goes to Master Composters Rebecca Randall, Pete Ash, Suellen Fast, Bethany Hopkins, and Elizabeth Miller, who gave presentations in December at Jerabek.

If you're a Master Composter and want to play the "Body Parts Game" and help kids learn more about composting just by making them laugh from saying "poop" five times, then give us a call — we'll sign you up! Contact the Solana Center for details.

Solana Center



for Environmental Innovation

Mission Statement

To create a better environment through innovation, leadership, education, and participation.

Inside this issue:

VERMICOMPOSTING IN SCHOOLS 1

WHAT'S IN MY COMPOST BIN NOW? 2

UPCOMING EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES 3

THANKS, MASTER COMPOSTERS! 3





A Green fruit beetle adult (left) seeks out rotting fruit in the leaf litter; the harmless grub (right), commonly found in compost piles, helps break down organic matter.

What's In My Compost Bin Now?

Green Fruit Beetle

(a.k.a., Green June Beetle, Fruit Beetle, and Fig Eater)

The Green Fruit Beetle is easily recognized by its large size (length 1.25 in., 20-30 mm) and the velvety olive-green color of the top of the thorax and wing covers. The underside of the body is shiny metallic green.

Using a horn-like projection on its nose for enlarging holes in fruit, the adult feeds on a wide variety of rotting fruits, such as peaches, apricots, nectarines, and grapes.

Range and Habitat

It may be abundant in your compost pile, seeking out decomposing fruit. It may also be found in fruit orchards and suburban neighborhoods where backyard

fruit trees grow. Originally native to Arizona and New Mexico, it gradually spread westward and didn't become common in San Diego until after the 1970s with the boom of organic gardening.

The adult is active from summer to early fall and, during this period, lays its eggs in compost piles and decomposing plant litter. The larva (grub) is fairly large (2 in., 50 mm), and its C-shaped body is pale white with a dark brown head. Larvae tunnel into compost piles, decomposing plant litter, and manure piles to feed on the organic material and develop quickly. Heat given off by the compost allows the grub to remain active the en-

tire year. When its feeding is disturbed, the larva rolls over on its back and inches away, using its body segments, not legs, for traction. It has rows of stiff, stout bristles on the back of the thorax, and because of this peculiar movement, it is known as a "crawly-back." During the spring, the larva forms an underground chamber in which to pupate. A winged adult emerges a few months later.

Often confused with the much smaller and destructive Japanese beetle, the Green Fruit Beetle causes little economic damage and is not controlled in California. The larva is harmless in your compost pile and actually helps break down organic matter. The bee-

tle can readily eat over-ripe or bird-damaged figs, peaches, and grapes, but its weak mouthparts are ineffective in ripping open most other plant material. Native plants, including plant pollen and cactus fruit, are rarely damaged initially by the beetle; it usually is found taking advantage of damage done by other insects.

Sources: Insects of the Los Angeles Basin, Charles Hogue, NHMLAC (1993); Green Fruit Beetles Are Enjoying the Figs, and Other Fruits of Your Labor, Fred Hoffman, www.farmerfred.com/greenbeetles.htm; San Diego Natural History Museum, David Faulkner, Research Associate, Entomology Department. Photos courtesy of USDA and University of Georgia.



Save the date ...

The Solana Center's annual breakfast to honor volunteers, present the Vermi Awards,

and give badges to recent graduates of the Master Composter Course is around the corner. Join us for ...

A Toast to Compost!

**Saturday, February 2, 9:30—11:30 am
San Diego Zoo, Rondaval Room**

RSVP to 760-436-7986 x216

Thank You! ... for volunteering this quarter, teaching workshops, staffing booths, maintaining compost demonstration sites, facilitating the Encinitas master composter course, selling compost bins, introducing school kids to vermicomposting, and responding to Rotline inquiries:

Traci Allen
Laura Anthony
Pete Ash
Deirdre Ballou
Michael Blood
Rachel Borgatti
Peter Bossen
Jim Carleton
Elaine Carreno
Jan Daniels
Taif Dhia
Doug Dossey
Whitney Duenez
Susan Elmore
Suellen Fast
Rich Flammer
Susan Glumac
Carol Graham
Jill Halme
Steven Halme
Diane Hollister

Bethany Hopkins
Matthew Huang
Dan Kuhn
Jerry Louis
Amy Ma
Elizabeth Miller
Georgia Nally
Rebecca Randall
Jim Renn
Celeste Robinson
Kristy Rygiel
Jean Scherschel
Jenny Van Pelt
Julie Wilkins

Upcoming Events & Volunteer Opportunities

San Diego Spring Master Composter Course

5 consecutive Tuesdays
April 8—May 6
6:00 – 8:30 pm

Sponsored by the City of San Diego, this 5-week course provides in-depth training in the art and science of composting. In return for this training, graduates volunteer 30 hours for the Solana Center, helping with workshops, school presentations, and events. Tell your friends, and volunteer to help with the course!

annual spring gardening festival and plant sale. We'll be selling low-cost compost bins and talking with folks about the thrill of making great dirt. Join us!

Lend a Hand at Quail Botanical Gardens

Two upcoming workshops you can help with: Saturday, February 16, 1-3 pm, or Saturday, March 1, 1-3 pm.

You'll be assisting a seasoned master composter. It's a great way to help the environment and fulfill your 30-hour commitment!

California-Friendly Gardening Festival & Bin Sale

Saturday, March 15
9 am—3 pm

Water Conservation Garden
Volunteer for a day of composting demonstrations at the Water Conservation Garden's

Other ways to volunteer:

See the complete list of workshops you can help with and earn your hours:
www.solanacenter.org.

Contact Joni to volunteer:
760-436-7986 x216
joni@solanacenter.org

The Composter is published quarterly by The Solana Center for Environmental Innovation, a nonprofit organization, to inform Master Composters about current volunteer opportunities, innovative technologies, and upcoming events.

Funding for *The Composter* is provided by:

The City of Encinitas
The City of San Diego
The County of San Diego



Contact us:

Solana Center for Environmental Innovation
137 N. El Camino Real, Encinitas, CA 92024
760-436-7986
www.solanacenter.org