



# The Green Door

Sept/October



The Green Door is a monthly newsletter of sustainable living and real estate geared to present and future homeowners.

*The question for each of us -- for the person sitting in your seat -- is, as my mentor Bucky Fuller would ask, "If the success or failure of this planet, and of human beings, depended on how I am and what I do, how would I be? What would I do?"*

**Lets Talk Trash!!** Here in Seattle it's amazing just how much of our trash isn't garbage. Recycling is mandatory so we've got bins for everything from glass to grass. We can throw food scraps in with this fall's leaves and put our paper waste in with our OJ containers. With a free sign anything we can't use is gone in a day, from broken concrete to an old computer chair, and someone in your neighborhood will gladly dig up an unwanted plant. If it's a fixture or piece of construction waste the *Restore* or *Second Use* will take it and *Craig's List* has every category imaginable for passing on the rest. The only items that seem left to the actual garbage bin these days are packaging materials and doggie doo.

**Stats in Seattle.** Household participation in the City's recycling program is high. 98% of households reported that they recycle paper, cardboard, plastics, metal and glass. 90% of those that recycle say they recycle more than 75% of these materials. 83% of households use the curbside yard waste program and 24% say they take yard waste to the transfer station. 44% say they do some yard waste composting at home. 96% say they put food waste in the regular trash and 54% use a garbage disposal. 26% report that they compost some food waste at home.

*Seattle Public Utilities Survey 2004-2005.*

**Why does Seattle want us to throw our food waste in the yard waste bin?** The amount of food-soiled organic waste in disposed residential garbage is significant. Food scraps and food soiled paper represented nearly 40% of the disposed 143,000 tons of residential garbage in 2002. The addition of certain types of food scraps (limited to "vegetative" type) to curbside yard waste collection carts is anticipated to recover 10-12,000 tons per year of new food-soiled waste. Food scrap categories include: **Vegetables and fruit - Breads, pasta and grains - Coffee grounds, filters and tea bags - Paper contaminated with food or grease - Paper plates, paper towels, pizza boxes - Loose paper layered with food scraps.**

**Seattle's commercial food waste recycling** is slated to start next summer. Under the terms of the program, businesses such as restaurants will place food waste for recycling in a separate container from their regular trash. Commercial accounts will have a financial incentive to recycle their food waste. The city's commercial haulers will charge the properties 20 percent less to collect a container of food waste than they would an identical-sized bin of regular trash.

**Cedar Grove Composting** is the final destination for all of the yard debris/ food scraps collected from residents and businesses in Seattle. Cedar Grove operates the largest single dedicated yard waste composting facility in the United States on 26 acres in the community of Maple Valley, Washington. Like making an exceptional wine, Cedar Grove applies an exacting science in compost production, Cedar Grove aerates 20 foot tall stacks of raw materials from below to encourage the growth of naturally occurring microbes that degrade the material, transforming it into finished compost. A feedback system closely monitors temperatures as they climb above 130 degrees F. to eliminate weed seeds, pesticide and herbicide residues and plant pathogens. By 2002, Cedar Grove had processed over 1.7 million tons of yard trimmings.

**Ban on Recyclables in Garbage.** Seattle Public Utilities has adopted an initiative that aims for zero waste in an effort to reduce dependency on landfills and to lower disposal, transportation and energy costs for the city. The initiative, called **Wasteless in Seattle**, calls for mandatory recycling (already in effect), with fines being given out starting in January of 2006. Residents, businesses and self-haulers are prohibited from disposing of significant amounts (10% by volume of container) of paper, cardboard, glass or plastic bottles as well as aluminum or tin cans. The city will also be installing up to 300 recycling dispensers in high-profile public areas and will offer curbside recycling for businesses.

**Garbage Fleet gets cleaner.** The city's solid waste fleet, contracted through Rabanco and Waste Management, totals 180 heavy-duty trucks. During the next six months, the diesel trucks are set to be retrofitted with state-of-the-art oxidation catalysts to reduce toxic tailpipe emissions.

**"We can transition to a society that views wastes as inefficient uses of resources and believes that most wastes can be eliminated. Eliminating wastes will contribute to environmental, economic and social vitality" - Washington State Department of Ecology's Beyond Waste Project.**

***“Create as much waste as you want, but make sure it makes money. What you realize is that it wasn't really waste at all, and the word ‘waste’ goes away.” - Janine Benyus, Biomimicry.***

## **A Zero Waste Approach**

Does it ease your eco-conscience to buy products that can be recycled? Should we then keep on consuming these products? Recycling requires transportation, energy, facilities, money and has byproducts of its own. Most products are only used once before they are thrown in the recycling bin. We may be reducing our trash but we are creating a ever increasing demand on our recycling industry. **Zero Waste is a philosophy and a design principle for the 21st Century. It includes 'recycling' but goes beyond recycling by taking a 'whole system' approach to the vast flow of resources and waste through human society.** Zero Waste maximizes recycling, minimizes waste, reduces consumption and ensures that products are made to be reused, repaired or recycled back into nature or the marketplace. Waste is not inevitable - waste is the result of bad design, and ultimately, the result of bad decision-making. The idea of "designing waste out" of our world is a dramatic paradigm shift in how we value and manage our natural resources. If you were personally responsible for making sure every item you purchased stayed out of the landfill, how would your buying habits change? Wouldn't you insist that all your products were recyclable, compostable or part of a manufacturer's responsibility program?

**Eco-Cycle**, located in Boulder, Colorado has fully embraced the Zero Waste model as their policy lighthouse to guide them through the fog of conflicting waste industry interests. As one of the largest non-profit, community-based recyclers in the country, they are working with thousands of local supporters and volunteers to spread the Zero Waste message, and have found them eager to embrace this next step beyond recycling. And why not? Is there really anything to like about landfills or incinerators?

**Boulder's Farmer's Market goes Zero Waste.** Over the winter, Eco-Cycle met with each market food vendor individually and found compostable alternatives for the items that previously generated trash at the market, including plates, bowls, cups – even straws and lids. The preferred products are made from corn, wheat, sugarcane, or other natural starches as an alternative to the plastic or plastic-coated paper serviceware that has been filling our landfills for decades (and staying there for centuries!). Signs at each food vendor's booth assure the public that everything's compostable or recyclable, and similar signs at each Zero Waste Station instruct people on how to sort their discards. After enjoying a meal or a snack at the market, visitors sort out the recyclable containers as usual, but rather than putting what's left in a bin marked "trash," they'll put it in a bin marked "compostables". Composting is a local solution to global pollution. Burying organic materials in a landfill generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to the global issue of climate change. Composting returns valuable nutrients to the natural cycle and helps local farmers restore depleted soils.

**Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things** by William McDonough & Michael Braungart. The authors start by challenging the idea of "reduce, reuse, recycle", doing more with less in order to minimize damage. Although an improvement, this approach is only postponing our inevitable degradation of the planet's systems and resources. It perpetuates the one-way "cradle to grave" manufacturing model, dating to the Industrial Revolution, that creates such fantastic waste and pollution in the first place. They propose using nature as our model for making things, where nothing is wasted.

**Garbage Land: On the Secret Trail of Trash** by Elizabeth Royte. In *Garbage Land*, acclaimed science writer Elizabeth Royte leads us on the wild adventure that begins once our trash hits the bottom of the can. By showing us what really happens to the things we've "disposed of," Royte reminds us that our decisions about consumption and waste have a very real impact — and that unless we undertake radical change, the garbage we create will always be with us: in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we consume. Royte leaves the clear impression that there's only one real solution: use less stuff.

The Green Door is brought to you by Cally Fulton and Danielle Johnson, both Real Estate Associates with GreenWorks Realty, Seattle and is written by JR Fulton, Architect and LEED Accredited Professional. To save trees and expand the opportunity to share information, please provide us with your e-mail address and the address of others interested in making their homes more sustainable. If you or someone you know would appreciate our real estate services please call- **Cally Fulton(206)786-5061** or **Danielle Johnson(206)679-0185**  
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## **Sept/Oct Websites**

Cedar Grove Compost  
[www.cedar-grove.com/default.htm](http://www.cedar-grove.com/default.htm)

Boulder's Ecocycle  
[www.ecocycle.org/ZeroWaste/index.cfm](http://www.ecocycle.org/ZeroWaste/index.cfm)

WA Beyond Waste  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/beyondwaste/](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/beyondwaste/)

Cradle to Cradle  
[www.mcdonough.com/cradle to cradle.htm](http://www.mcdonough.com/cradle%20to%20cradle.htm)

Garbage Land  
[www.grist.org/advice/books/2005/07/28/motavalli-garbage/](http://www.grist.org/advice/books/2005/07/28/motavalli-garbage/)

Grassroots Recycling Network & Zero Waste  
<http://www.grrn.org/>

WA Citizens for Resource Conservation  
[www.wastenotwashington.org/index.htm](http://www.wastenotwashington.org/index.htm)

## **Seattle Sustainable Residence Diary**

*"I always wanted to be a com-post modern architect, not sure I succeeded".*  
We have decided to go with radiant heating for our new house. Once the radiant rough-in is complete, the interior house work can begin. We are still deciding between a standard gas boiler and a gas hot water heater. The deciding factor will be energy efficiency and capacity. We are hoping for a solstice move-in. - JRF

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