Organic waste

Fact sheet

Did you know?

- Organic waste is anything that was or is living.
- Garden waste includes leaves, grass clippings, branches, hay, flowers, weeds, sawdust, woodchips and bark.
- Food waste includes fruit, vegetables, teabags, coffee grounds, bread, cereals, eggshells, grains, meat, and dairy products.
- Other materials include paper, cardboard, animal/people hair, animal faeces, vacuum cleaner dust, wool, wood ash.
- At school more than 50 per cent of our waste is organic material. Ultimately that means that 50 per cent of our waste can be easily recycled at school and diverted from landfill.

About organic waste

Organics can be extremely valuable, especially to our nutrient deficient soils in Western Australia (WA), and according to some *"there is no such thing as organic waste, only wasted organics"* (Vermi~BIOLOGICALS).

There are a number of ways organic material can be diverted from landfill, and this is done throughout WA. In several regional councils within the Perth metropolitan area, organics are collected with mixed rubbish and brought to an alternative waste treatment (AWT) plant where the organic material is separated from the rubbish and composted. In many suburbs, green garden waste is periodically collected from the kerbside to be turned into mulch. In some areas, residents are provided with a special third bin, in addition to their rubbish and recycling bins, for green kitchen and garden waste.

The average breakdown of waste generated at school is as follows:

- 41 per cent paper and cardboard
- 13 per cent food organics
- 10 per cent common recyclables
- 36 per cent residues (such as desks, chairs, equipment etc.).

These numbers suggest that at school we can easily divert over 50 per cent of waste from landfill by recycling all paper and cardboard and using the organic waste for composting and worm farming – the products from which could be used on a school garden/veggie patch. See the 'How to compost' fact sheet for how to set up a compost.

Being Waste Wise about organic waste

Reduce

It is important to reduce the amount of organic waste going to landfill. When organic waste is sent to landfill, it is placed in an anaerobic environment (without oxygen) because the waste is buried or capped with dirt and/or clay. When waste breaks down in these anaerobic environments, with the help of specialized micro organisms, it produces methane gas. The more organics that we dispose of in landfill the more methane gas will be produced, which contributes to climate change (see the 'Climate change' fact sheet to learn more).

Reuse

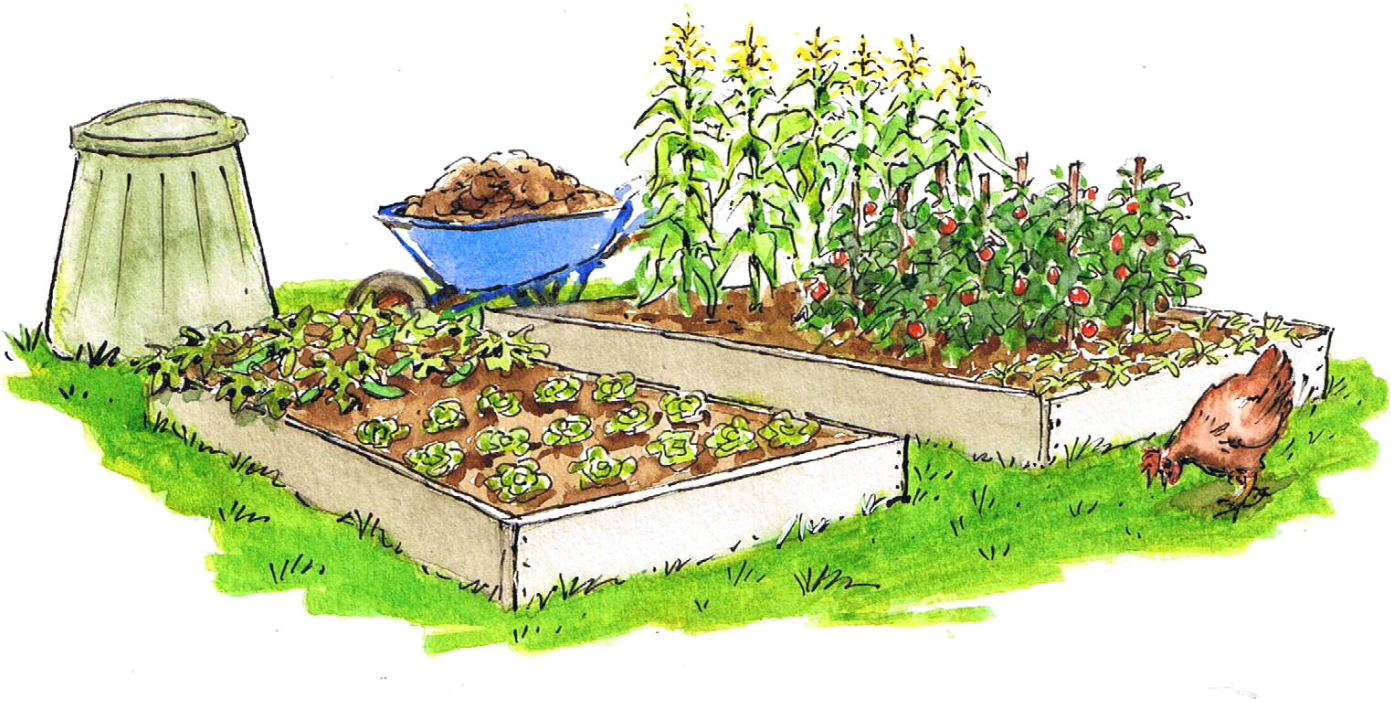
Organic garden waste can be reused as mulch. Mulch is chopped, chipped or shredded plant material that is applied on top of soils. It is created by physically breaking down plant material using a chipper or other device. A thick (15-20cm) layer of mulch will reduce water loss from the soil and often prevent weeds from growing/spreading. Mulch can also prevent soil erosion and provide habitat for insects. Organic mulches include: straw or hay, bark chips, fallen leaves, chipped tree prunings and grass clippings. Weeds or diseased plants are not included in mulch as the weeds or disease may spread if used on the school garden.

Recycle

Organic waste can be recycled as mulch, compost, soil conditioners, recycled timber and firewood, food for a worm farm, and animal bedding. Recycling organic waste also reduces the amount of waste that goes to landfill, reduces or eliminates the distance that waste may need to travel, and gives value to waste to help develop products and markets for green waste.

Composting and worm farming are probably the easiest ways to recycle organic waste. Both actions divert organics from landfill and allow waste to break down in an aerobic (with oxygen) environment so that no methane gas is emitted. See the 'Worm farming in schools' fact sheet and the 'How to compost' fact sheet to find out more.

Organic waste is a valuable resource when used in the form of compost, worm castings or mulch because it can improve soil quality and reduce evaporation of precious water from the soil.



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www.reln.com.au/html/homecompostingnew.html

www.howtocompost.org

www.abc.net.au/gardenin

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