



The Daily Gleaner

Answering your 'green' questions & debunking some myths

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Since June, when Fredericton's *Green Matters* greenhouse gas reduction campaign was launched and this column commenced, I and the other columnists have received many 'how to be green' questions and concerns from Fredericton residents. In this column I will try to answer some of your questions and perhaps dispel some myths as well.

Can I put glass in my blue box?

No. Glass refundable beverage containers can be taken to a redemption centre for deposit; and non-refundable glass (i.e. jars, window panes) are not recyclable at the Fredericton Region Solid Waste Commission (FRSWC) so it must go in your garbage (or be reused in your home).

Why doesn't Fredericton recycle glass?

First, something to think about. Glass represents only 4% of the residential waste stream, and half of that 4% is refundable at redemption centres. So that leaves 2% of glass that would be captured through recycling programs - a relatively small amount of material that would be diverted from the landfill.

Now to answer the question. Glass is not accepted in the recycling program for a number of reasons, including:

- The number one rule in glass recycling is "don't break it" - glass is considered a 'contaminant' in all other recyclable materials. In a municipal recycling program, some breaking and mixing of glass with other recyclables is unavoidable. But these materials when mixed with glass can no longer be recycled and would have to be landfilled. So one might gain a 2% landfill diversion from recycling glass, but the tonnage of recyclable paper, plastic and metals would decrease significantly due to glass contamination.
- Incorporating glass into recycling programs requires significant investment (high transportation, collection, and handling costs) and there is not a viable market in close proximity. It is difficult to justify the added cost, especially when money could be spent capturing remaining paper, plastic and metals still going into the landfill (10 times the tonnage of glass).
- Finally, glass is an inert material; it is non-reactive/benign in the landfill (it is made of silica sand). It poses no threat to groundwater, surface water or soil, and produces no methane or CO₂ emissions when landfilled.

Why doesn't Fredericton have a curbside composting program?

Organic matter comprises 50% of the residential waste stream, so this is an important question. Fredericton promotes backyard composting versus curbside composting for several reasons. According to FRSWC, some experiences from jurisdictions with curbside composting programs have been negative, including:

- Health and safety issues at composting facilities due to spores and gases produced if compost is not handled properly or kept at the proper temperature.

- There is no market for municipal compost, and many companies have banned use of municipal compost for agricultural/food production purposes due to unknown composition of compost.
- Residents who take part in curbside composting tend to be less attentive to the materials they put in curbside compost (versus backyard compost), and often non-compostable materials end up contaminating the compost, the result being that it goes directly to landfill.

Switzerland banned municipal composting programs fifteen years ago due to many of these issues.

Backyard composting supports the Green Matters campaign, because it is a prime example of 'waste reduction at source'. Greenhouse gases are reduced because less 'garbage' is being trucked to the landfill, and less methane-producing organic matter is going into the landfill, which means a smaller 'carbon footprint'.

So backyard composting it is! Start by coming to 'Green on the Green' – a Green Matters campaign public event (September 29, 10am-5pm between the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and walking bridge). There will be 'green' exhibits, seminars, give-aways, and the Fredericton Backyard Composters will be selling composters for \$25 to Frederictonians (while supplies last, so come early). Then attend the composting seminar at the event to learn the 'art of composting'!

Sonya Hull is a consultant and City of Fredericton Project Manager for the Green Matters greenhouse gas reduction campaign. Find out more at www.greenmattersfredericton.com, or if you have other 'green' questions please contact us at greenmatters@fredericton.ca or call 460-2777 (the Green Matters Hotline). For more recycling information check out www.frswc.ca, and for the benefits of composting go to <http://www.fredericton.ca/en/environment/benefitsofcomposting.asp>