

Composting project turns food waste

A commercial composting facility is helping Waiheke's restaurants turn food waste into a resource.

The Compost Co.'s project manager, Prashanti Lovegrove, says food waste in landfill is problematic as it produces greenhouse gases and toxic leachate, so processing compostable waste separately is the only sustainable option.

Funding from Auckland Council's Waste Innovation and Minimisation Fund has supported the commercial food waste collection for two years, she says. The project processes 20 tonnes of food waste a year. "We have maintained a steady average of 1.6 tonnes of food waste per month."

Compostable packaging made of paper and PLA (polylactic acid) is also sorted and shredded at the site. Although it is mixed into the compost it doesn't add any benefits and is processed as a social service, says Prashanti.

"It would be better if we had less of this. We need to move towards a reuse economy, rather than single use."

Compost Co. runs two composting systems side by side: a hot compost and a cooler ferment decomposition process.

The ideal temperature in the hot system is between 55°C and 65°C to breakdown PLA, says Prashanti. In the second system, a venture into large scale Bokashi, Prashanti uses microorganisms to start food waste fermenting before it is mixed with carbon for an anaerobic composting phase. The bin is then turned to aerate the mixture and the temperature is allowed to rise to pasteurise the compost before it is bagged and sold. • Erin Johnson



The Compost Co. collects food waste from 19 customers, including restaurants, Piritahi Marae, the Ostend Market and zero waste events across Waiheke.



Project manager, Prashanti Lovegrove, runs two composting systems side by side. Shown here is the hot compost system that ideally runs between 55 and 65 degrees.

Compostable packaging made from paper and PLA (polylactic acid) such as takeaway coffee lids and straws, is sorted, shredded then mixed into the compost bins. However it doesn't add any beneficial nutrients to the compost.



Fungus growing is a good sign that decomposition is going well.



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into a valuable resource



The second system is a cooler process involving fermentation. Prashanti uses microorganisms to start the food waste fermenting as soon as it is collected.



Food waste that has already been fermenting is then mixed with carbon for a second anaerobic composting phase.

Coffee husks are added to the fermenting food waste and then stomped down to get air out. More food and carbon is added until the bin is full. Then it is sealed and made as airtight as possible.

Worms arrive within days of the bins being set and stay for the whole process, thriving in the lower temperatures of the inoculated, anaerobic environment.



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