Last month's Community Talk "Not Your Average Compost Pile", with Elly Ventura, certified master composter, was the last in our year-long Community Talks series. Elly gave a lively presentation about the many different methods of composting food scraps, including a few great methods for composting meat, bones and dairy. She brought lots of props, including the "Green Cone" composter, an example of a Bokashi Fermentation System (which essentially "pickles" your food scraps), and, most excitingly, a bin of red wriggler worms, working hard to compost her office food scraps into a dark, super nutrient rich compost. Elly asked those in attendance to share their home composting methods, and it was so interesting to hear the many different ways that people are creating compost. Many attendees were experienced composters and gardeners themselves, and showed up to swap stories and see what else they could learn. Everyone was provided with lots of take home information, free packets of High Mowing Seeds, and one lucky attendee won a Bokashi Fermentation System of her very own. Thanks to Elly for her enthusiastic presentation on the joys and struggles of composting, and thanks to all who showed up to talk compost!
Backyard Compost Questions Answered in Free Workshop

Ginny Cooke

International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW) is the largest and most comprehensive education initiative of the compost industry. It is hosted by the U.S. Composting Council, and celebrated annually in the first full week of May. Elly Ventura, Master Composter and Outreach and Communications Coordinator for the Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District (LRSWMD), with assistance from Ginny Cooke, Master Composter Intern, presented “Let’s Talk Compost” on May 3 at the Lanphere Memorial Library in Hyde Park.

Elly and Ginny covered composting basics and answered questions about Vermont’s Universal Recycling law, which will ban all food scraps from the landfill in 2020. Some participants were new to the world of composting. Others were veterans who lent sound advice to the discussion of such topics as pests, compost recipes, and using worms to compost (i.e., vermiculture). Participants gained a solid foundation for creating their own compost piles or enhancing existing ones.

Everyone received a free compost countertop collector, High Mowing Organic seeds, and materials with facts and instructions to guide them on their composting journey. As part of the workshop, the LRSWMD donated a Soil Saver compost bin to the library.

In the Photo: Elly Ventura on the left, Ginny Cooke on the right
Build Your Own Worm Bin Workshop: A Rotten Success

Six people came from across Lamoille County on a chilly Thursday evening to learn about vermicomposting and to make their own worm bin. The workshop was graciously hosted by John Hayden at the Farm Between in Jeffersonville. Attendees were treated to a farm tour where the organic agricultural practices employed at the Nursery were explained by John. Next the worms were introduced.

Elly Ventura, Master Composter and Outreach and Communications Coordinator for the Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District introduced her worm bin to the group. It was very interesting to have two vermicomposting systems side by side to compare the different diets, processes and uses of the finished product. It was quickly discovered that we were meeting “city worms” and “farm worms”!

Elly’s red wigglers live in an opaque Rubbermaid container with a tight fitting lid. These worms eat about a cup of diced fruit and vegetable scraps a week and have castings harvested by hand about twice a year. The Farm Between Worms are given a varied diet of fruit pulp, meats, breads and other collected food scraps and live in four-separate Soil Saver compost bins. At the workshop in early May, John had one Soil Saver of worms outside and the other three were still in the basement waiting for the weather to remain just a bit warmer. After the growing season, the castings are left in the barn to cure and worms to die off, and the bins and remaining worms are moved back inside to continue the composting process throughout the winter months.

Attendees were asked to bring their own opaque container to transform into a home for their worms. An informal Q&A session spontaneously broke out as the different worm systems were being explained by Elly and John. The difference between red wigglers and earthworms was explained. (Red wigglers are surface feeders while earthworms live deep in the soil. Red wigglers eat the decomposer microbes on the food while earthworms eat the already decomposed remnants of food.) A question was asked about the effects of using de-wormer on horses and how that affects the worm population in manure piles. (De-worm kills worms - all worms that come into contact with it.) Questions were asked about proper feeding and bin maintenance and then we got to work.

The first step was drilling holes in the containers for circulation. Once holes were drilled, newspaper was ripped into strips and dipped into a bucket of water. This served as the bedding for the worms. Then a container of worms, supplied by the Farm Between, was added on top of the bedding. The container of worms also contained some castings and food remnants to help them acclimate to their new home. Dry paper strips were added on top before everyone put the lids on and packed their new composting systems up to head home.

Hopefully the worms are as happy with their new owners as the people were at the very successful workshop. A special thank you to John Hayden for opening his farm and sharing his time and knowledge with us.
Three Master Composters and MC Interns showed up bright and early the first Saturday morning in May to conclude and celebrate International Compost Awareness Week. MCs and MC Interns approached drivers who were attending the LRSWMD Household Hazardous Waste Event that was happening simultaneously. Drivers were asked if they were aware of the Universal Recycling and Composting Law and if they had any questions about composting. They also took this opportunity to promote the Master Composter program to over 200 cars that attended the event. For their time, everyone was offered their choice of High Mowing Organic Seeds that were donated from our neighbors down the road.

The LRSWMD wanted this to be a one stop shopping event for potential diverters of organics. Green Cones, Soil Savers, and countertop collectors were all available to purchase at the event. Thank you to all Master Composters and MC Interns for volunteering to help out with this event. Keep on celebrating compost!