

RIVERSIDE

Students dig new composting project

Other town schools to follow in efforts aimed at cutting food waste

BY PAUL SCHOTT



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media

Fifth-grader Jackson Fels throws what's left of an apple into the new compost bucket at Riverside School on Thursday. Under a composting program the school began last week, students throw leftover scraps vegetables into the special container at the end of lunch, and the contents are then put in a composting school.



Riverside School Principal Christopher Weiss shows off the school's compost bin on Tuesday. Eventually, the compost will be used on the school garden and plantings.



Fifth-graders, from left, Emily Phillipps, Ines Aramjo, Ellie Wayland and Aaliyah Brown talk about the new composting program at Riverside School in Greenwich on Thursday. The program began last week.

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Aleksandra Moch, an environmental analyst with the Greenwich Conservation Department, stands beside the compost bin behind Riverside School in Greenwich.

Riverside School students started a tradition when they returned from vacation last week: They are now making fruit and vegetable trash “salads” every day in the cafeteria from their leftovers.

Students in all of the grades pitch in by adding their half-eaten apples, oranges, bananas and grapefruits, along with the occasional green bean and the healthy scraps of their lunches, into a composting bucket.

“You can help the earth and environment this way,” said fifth-grader Jackson Fels, after tossing an apple core in the bucket at the end of a lunch period last week. “Instead of wasting it, I put it in the bucket, and it can be used again.”

The new program is the product of a partnership between Riverside and the town’s Conservation Department. Conservation officials had been eyeing a composting initiative to teach environmental sustainability to Greenwich students for some time. A \$20,000 grant that the department received last month from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection provided the impetus to launch the pilot program.

“The reason why I picked Riverside School was because I find (Principal) Chris Weiss to be very progressive, and I’d like to have someone open-minded,” said Aleksandra Moch, an environmental analyst with the Conservation Department, who has spearheaded the initiative.

In the next week, Eastern Middle School, down the street from Riverside, is set to become the next school to start composting. The state grant will allow the program to expand to another seven schools in town. Eventually, Moch wants to run the program at all schools in Greenwich, she said.

Moch and a colleague visited Riverside last week to give students a primer on composting. At the end of lunch block, school staff remind the students about the composting bin. Posters in the cafeteria also promote the program.

There is also a composting bucket in the kitchen, which the cafeteria staff used to toss away their own fruit and vegetable scraps.

“We can all work together as a town,” Weiss said. “We can all contribute together in this process to reduce waste. That’s our goal.”

Students have not needed much help to get into the habit of dropping their scraps in the new bucket.

“I think it’s important to compost because the earth needs dirt to help the plants and flowers,” said fifth-grader Ellie Wayland.

Parents are also keen about the composting program.

“It’s teaching them to be aware of what they’re bringing to school and how they can reduce their waste,” said Kathy McCormack, who represents the Riverside PTA in the district’s green schools initiative.

Second-graders, who are studying composting in their classes, have taken a lead role. At 2 p.m. each day, a pair of them take the buckets outside with a custodian and dump and mix the contents in with leaves stored in new wooden bins. Park and Recreation Department staff built the repositories with lumber donated from by the Greenwich-based Interstate + Lakeland Lumber.

Once established, the compost from the program will be used to enrich soil for the school’s vegetable and herb garden, and other plantings around the campus.

“It’s kind of like the circle of life,” said fifth-grader Emily Phillipps. “When those fruits and vegetables turn to dirt, the dirt grows more fruits and vegetables.” pschott@scni.com; 203-625-4439; twitter: @paulschott