

January 2023

CIRCLE C RANCH COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CIRCLE C HOMEOWNER'S ASSOCIATION

News & Announcements

www.circlecranch.info



Sunday, January 1, 2023

New Year's Day – Happy New Year

Friday, January 6, 2023

Epiphany–The 12th Day of Christmas

Thursday, January 12, 2023

Candidate Questionnaires Are Due

Sunday, January 15, 2023

All Holiday Lights & Decor Should Be Removed

Monday, January 16, 2023

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Wednesday, January 18, 2023

Winnie the Pooh Day

Sunday, January 22, 2023

Chinese New Year

Wednesday, January 25, 2023

6:30pm–8:30pm – Circle C HOA Board Meeting at the
Community Center/via zoom

Friday, January 27, 2023

International Day of Commemoration for Holocaust
Victims

Wednesday, February 1, 2023

First 1/2 of HOA Dues Mailed With Ballot to Homeowners

Thursday, February 2, 2023

Groundhog Day

Saturday, February 11, 2023

Circle C Bakers' Bazaar at the Community Center

Sunday, February 12, 2023

Superbowl Sunday
Lincoln's Birthday

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

Valentine's Day

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

6pm – Candidate Forum at the Community Center

Friday, February 17, 2023

Random Acts of Kindness Day

Monday, February 20, 2023

President's Day
Washington's Birthday
National Love Your Pet Day

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

6:30pm–8:30pm – Circle C HOA Board Meeting at the
Community Center
Also Available via Zoom

www.circlecranch.com

CCHOA NUMBERS

HOA Mgmt Office.....info@circlecranch.info
512-288-8663
HOA Financial Office.....tgiles@mgilescpa.com
512-451-9901
Aquatics Director.....director@ccswim.net
512-363-5578

CIRCLE C AMENITIES

Circle C Swim Center.....512-363-5578
Circle C Avena Pool.....512-292-1518
Circle C Community Pool.....512-301-8259
Circle C GreyRock Pool.....512-291-8398
Circle C Café.....512-288-6058
Circle C CDC.....512-288-9792
GreyRock Golf Course (City Owned/Operated)
512-288-4297

GreyRock Tennis Club.....512-301-8685

CIRCLE C GATED COMMUNITIES

Enclave off Spruce Canyon

Spectrum Management.....Krystal Fernandez 512-834-3900

Enclave off La Crosse

Relevant Management.....Kim Todd 512-580-4212

Fairways Estates

Spectrum Management.....Krystal Fernandez 512-834-3900

Park West

Goodwin Management.....Marilyn Childress, 512-502-7509

Hillside Estate

RealManage.....Christine Gamache 866-473-2573

Avena Estates

Relevant Management.....Kim Todd 512-580-4212

Muirfield

RealManage.....Victoria Escamilla 866-473-2573

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Stephen Bega.....Vice President
David Lachance.....Treasurer
Trinh Bartlett.....Secretary
Board Members: Russ Hodes, Jason Bram, Kimberly
De La Garza and Mark Blanton
Contact the Board at: directors@circlecranch.info

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

City of Austin Solid Waste.....512-974-1945
Dead Animal Collection.....512-974-2000
Abandoned Vehicles.....512-974-8119
Pothole Complaints.....512-974-8750
Stop Signs.....512-457-4885
Street Light Maintenance.....311

SCHOOLS

Clayton Elementary.....512-841-9200
Kiker Elementary.....512-414-2584
Bear Creek Elementary.....512-414-0040
Mills Elementary.....512-841-2400
Cowan Elementary.....512-841-2700
Bailey Middle School.....512-414-4990
Gorzycki Middle School.....512-841-8600
Bowie High School.....512-414-5247

UTILITY PROVIDERS

Pedernales Electric.....512-219-2602
City of Austin.....512-494-9400
Texas Gas Service.....800-700-2443
City of Austin Water.....512-972-1000
MidTex Water Company.....866-654-7992
City of Austin Solid Waste.....512-974-1945
Oak Hill Post Office.....800-275-8777

Holiday Lights & Décor:

This is a friendly reminder that holiday lights and décor must be removed before January 15th.

Trash, Recycling, & Composting Carts:

Please remember to pull all trash, recycling, and composting carts back to behind your fence and keep lawns and properties clean and free of miscellaneous items. Thank you for keeping Circle C one of the best-looking neighborhoods in town!



Children's Holiday Party Recap

In past years, the weather has not always cooperated with our annual Children's Holiday Party so outdoor activities can pose a challenge for our office. On December 3rd, 2022, however, the weather was absolutely beautiful, and the kids enjoyed playing games, riding a train, and/or visiting with animals. Thank you to everyone who joined us and brought toy donations for Partnerships for Children's Holiday Wishes Program! And thank you to Lauren and her helpers from Miles of Smiles, who graciously provided pictures with SANTA for our families that attended.

Play Equipment in Front Yards:

Please remember that recreational equipment may not be placed in the front yards of Circle C homes. Our Covenants, Conditions, & Restrictions (CC&Rs) for Circle C state: "No recreational equipment, including but not limited to swing sets, skateboards, bicycle ramps, and basketball nets shall be permitted in the front yard of any residential structure."

In 2020—because our Circle C playgrounds were closed due to the pandemic—the HOA board elected to make a temporary exception to this CC&R. The Circle C playgrounds have been open for some time now, however, and so we must return to enforcing the CC&R. Therefore, beginning February 1, 2023, homes with any play equipment, including slack lines or Ninja lines, will be found in violation and subject to fines. For questions or concerns, please email info@circlecranch.com.

Looking for HOA Board Candidates:

Our Circle C HOA Board has 2 openings available for our March 2023 election.

The HOA Board Nomination Committee is calling for nominations for the 2 open board positions.

This process is open to all current members. Elected candidates will serve a 3-year term beginning in March 2023.

To complete a candidate questionnaire form or for more information about the HOA board election, officer roles, and state statutes regulations, please visit our www.circlecranch.com website. Look for the "Stay Connected" tab on the top and click on "News and Announcements."

Hey Circle C Families,

Your Santa Photos from the great HOA Holiday Party are available now through 1.31.23 for FREE DOWNLOADS. Visit the link below to find your images and the step-by-step downloading instructions. Please be sure to download them before 1.31.23, as they will be removed from our system after that time. Enjoy!

{Note: For things to work properly, be sure to view and download from a computer - not a mobile device.}

Santa Photos & free downloads:

<https://www.milesofsmilesphotography.com/circle-c-santa-pictures>

Merry Christmas!

-Sarah Jordan & Lauren Darling

{The Miles of Smiles Photography Team}



HOA Board Election and Voting Information:

Candidate Meet & Greet on February 15, 2023:

On February 15, 2023, the Circle C HOA will hold our Candidate Meet & Greet at our community center. Homeowners are encouraged to attend the meeting, ask questions, and get to know our candidates. Attendance is also provided via ZOOM, with the link emailed to homeowners with emails on file at our office or may be found on the www.circlecranch.com website under the "Stay Connected" tab. Questions for the candidates may be posted via the "chat" option on ZOOM.

HOA Board Member Election & Annual Meeting

On March 22, 2023, the HOA board members' election and annual meeting will be held at the Community Center. Attendance at the meeting is also provided via ZOOM. More information can be found via the "Resources" tab on our website or feel free to call or email the HOA Office at 512-288-8663 or email info@circlecranch.info.

Electronic Voting and Paper Ballot Options for Voting:

The Circle C HOA is pleased to once again offer electronic voting for our HOA board member election.

Those who have provided email addresses will receive an email with an invitation to vote. Voting may also be accessed online at www.circlecranch.com using a "unique code" assigned to each homeowner and printed on the semi-annual billing statement mailed on February 1st.

Voting by paper ballot is another option. Election ballots/proxies are located on the back of the semi-annual statements and are due by March 17, 2023. For replacement absentee ballot/proxy, please email info@circlecranch.info or call 512-288-8663

Annual Dues and Report to the Membership

Annual Report to the Membership will be available in the March 2023 Newsletter:

The Board of Directors' 2022 Annual Report to the Membership will be available in the March 2023 newsletter. A copy will also be posted on our website and available at the HOA office during March 2023.

CCHOA Board Meetings:

The Circle C HOA Board of Directors meets the last Wednesday of the month at 6:30pm. The next HOA Board Meeting will be Wednesday, January 25, 2023.

Meetings are held at the HOA Community Center and attendance for homeowners is available via ZOOM. Links to the meeting and agendas may be found at www.circlecranch.com under the "Resources" tab. Homeowners must be logged onto the site to view agendas and find the link to the ZOOM meetings. Homeowners may sign up to speak at the meeting by calling the HOA manager at 512-288-8663 or emailing info@circlecranch.info.

Contact Information:

Our Circle C HOA manager may be reached by email at info@circlecranch.info or via phone at 512-288-8663. Our Newsletter writer may be reached at CCWriter@CircleCRanch.info.

Annual Assessments and an Increase in Dues

Due to the rising costs of our aging infrastructures throughout Circle C, such as our swimming pools and irrigation systems, the Circle C HOA annual cap has increased from \$740 to \$814.

Annual assessments for 2023 will be mailed on the 1st of February and are due March 1st. Ballots and proxies for the election of the HOA Board Members will be printed on the back of the assessments, and the Annual Meeting will be held on March 22, 2023, in person and via ZOOM.

Homeowners may pay semi-annual assessments via three options:

- Mail your check to PO Box 163541, Austin, TX 78716
- Make your payment using Bill Pay through your financial institution.
- Use the "On-line Payment" option through the Circle C HOA website. There is a 2% convenience fee for this option.

Payment will NOT be accepted at the HOA Office or in the drop box outside the office. Please do not postdate checks or staple checks to the invoice. For questions regarding assessments, please contact the financial office at 512-451-9901.

About Our Newsletter:

As you may have noticed, the January newsletter is only available electronically. Due to the rising costs for Peel, Inc. to produce the newsletter and USPS issues, our last newsletter using Peel, Inc. was December 2022. We are working on partnering with another newsletter publisher but in the meantime, the newsletter will be available on the website around the 1st of each month. We will continue to target our content to keep homeowners updated on appropriate Circle C announcements and notices. Articles herein are intended to offer information that might be of use to our residents and to share current or historical events. We do not provide legal, medical, or expert advice but welcome input from our neighbors with expertise. We would love to hear from you!

Request for Nominations:

We are always interested in nominations of our wonderful residents for our recurring features below:

“Spotlight on a Circle C Teen”—If you know of impressive neighborhood teenagers that might be interested in being featured in an article showcasing their accomplishments, please feel free to reach out to us at the contact information below.

“Angels Among Us”—Also, if you know extraordinary residents that are changing lives in some way, please reach out to us for consideration in our “Angels Among Us” recurring feature.

Please note that, in an effort not to interfere with our advertisers that fund this publication, we may not promote or mention businesses. We also do not publish letters or op-eds because we wish to keep our newsletter factual and neutral. Thank you for your understanding and for being a part of our community.

Circle C Aquatics News

Lifeguards – 2023

Looking for a job this summer? The first session of our 2023 Lifeguard Certification Program will begin in February. For more information on the courses, registration and open positions go to www.circlecranch.com/aquatics for all updates.

Year -Round Youth Swimming - Open Enrollment

Our year-round USA Swimming Swim Team is accepting new and returning swimmers. For more information on our swim team, including information on how to enroll, please visit www.circlecranch.com/select

Pool hours here

Swim Center

January 2, 2023- March 10, 2023

Monday-Friday 6a-9:30a and 4p-8p

Saturday 8a-1p

Sunday CLOSED

CIRCLE C FARMERS MARKET

Feathered Fork Farms	Jake & Blue's Dog food
Bonnet Farms	Tamale Addiction
I am Farms	Lamba's Royal Indian food
Hacklemore Ranch	Cinzos Sauces
Hamilton Pool Vineyard	Native Roots Salsa
Numnumsforkids	Left Hand Jelly
Yallitizer's	Harin's Specialty Tea
OneRth Farms	Motto Ayumi Kimchi
Lilli De Paris Bakery	Pancho Sauces
Gem Sweets Bakery	William Wellness
Yums Bakers	Concious Pet Life
Cookie Plant ATX	Bry's Beauty Essentials
Brewcado Coffee	Goesmin Regenerative

JAN 06	JAN 13	JAN 20	JAN 27
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3 pm to 6 pm | Fridays

CIRCLE C
COMMUNITY CENTER

7817 LACROSSE AVE.
AUSTIN, TX

Don't forget to pick up after your pets!



Our Circle C Bakers Bazaar



Talented people abound in our Circle C neighborhood. So, when COVID-19 rocked our world in 2020, throwing us off-kilter, many creatives turned to their go-to crafts while others developed new talents. Because, in an uncertain world, project-making can effectively serve as a constructive outlet to help keep our sanity.

Once the pandemic subsided, however, several of these creatives did not wish to stop the momentum. For example, a handful of Circle C women who had honed their baking skills before, during, or after the pandemic continued to produce their cookies, cinnamon rolls, and other treats for neighbors, friends, and family members. With the encouragement of loved ones, these bakers each followed their individual paths to owning their very own cottage industry.

Circle C resident Susan Anderson was one of these women that started her own such business, The Cookie Plant ATX, last year in 2021.

“I needed a creative outlet and something that was just for me to help with the COVID burnout,” she tells us. Word spread and The Cookie Plant ATX took off, but what seemed to please Susan the most—even more than the success of her own business—was the connections that she’s formed with other bakers in the neighborhood. In other words, her competition.

“One of the things that really hooked me when I first started my baking business was the cottage industry baking community right here in our neighborhood,” Susan explains. “Everyone is so supportive of one another and welcoming!”

Last spring, Susan and a fellow cottage industry baker, Lauren Binford—owner of Blue Door Sweets—met for coffee. They discussed ideas for ways to help each other grow their businesses and to help other Circle C bakers as well.



“That was when the Circle C Bakers’ Bazaar was born,” Susan declares. “We loved the idea of getting neighborhood cottage bakers together and offering our community a one-stop shopping experience.”

The Circle C Bakers’ Bazaar currently consists of seven core bakers, and they usually allow open spots at the venue for one or two guest bakers interested in trying things out. In 2022, they held three bazaars and, moving forward, they plan to hold four bazaars a year

The core cottage industry bakers are:

1. The Cookie Plant ATX – owned by Susan Anderson (@thecookieplantatx on Facebook)
2. Blue Door Sweets – owned by Lauren Binford (@bluedoorsweetsatx on Facebook)
3. Ahava Dough Company – owned by Jessica Hickman (@AhavaDoughCo on Facebook)
4. C'est Sweet Bakery – owned by Maha Melhem (@C'est Sweet on Facebook)
5. Cutie Pops – owned by Laura Charley (@qtcakepopshop on Facebook)
6. Paris Bake Shop – owned by Paris Broumely (ParisBakeShop.ATX on Instagram)
7. That Scottish Baker – owned by Alison Stubbs (specializing in shortbread cookies)

Below is a little information about 3 core bakers:

From Susan Anderson – The Cookie Plant ATX



I am the owner and baker at The Cookie Plant ATX where I make custom–designed cookie orders, including everything from corporate logos to specialized birthday cookies. I also offer gourmet drop cookies, cookie cakes, and other baked goods on request. I recently started as a vendor at the Circle C Farmer's Market as well. And as they say the rest is history!

The Cookie Plant ATX may be reached via Facebook @thecookieplantatx or Instagram @cookieplantatx



From Lauren Binford – Blue Door Sweets

Let's start by answering the obvious question. Is there really a blue door? Yes, there is! Blue Door Sweets is owned and operated by me, Lauren Binford, out of my home kitchen here in Circle C.

Years ago, I started baking cinnamon rolls for my family to enjoy as a special treat on Christmas morning. I have so many precious memories of sitting with my family and eating cinnamon rolls among the torn wrapping paper, unspooled ribbons, and empty stockings strewn about our living room.

It did not take long for it to become a cherished Christmas tradition. The cinnamon roll word got around, and I started making the rolls as Christmas gifts for friends and family. I was thrilled to be a small part of their holiday traditions. People kept telling me how tasty my treats were, and I even got a few suggestions that I should start a business. But, with four boys and a husband to take care of, life kept intervening.



Fast forward a few years and my husband was presented with a job opportunity in his hometown of Austin that he couldn't pass up. So, we packed up our crew and moved to Circle C. It turned out that moving to a new city during a global pandemic and my desire to meet new people gave me the push I needed to start Blue Door Sweets. And I have been rolling along since. Now my cinnamon rolls are available year-round, so people can enjoy them whenever the craving hits. And while I

love knowing that my customers enjoy my cinnamon rolls, the people I have met and friends I have made because of this business have been the icing on the “roll” for me.

The website for Blue Door Sweets is <http://www.bluedoorsweets.com>. They may also be reached via Facebook @bluedoorsweetsatx or Instagram @bluedoorsweets.

From Jessica Hickman – Ahava Dough Company

I’m Jessi and I am the baker, mom, and neighbor behind Ahava Dough Company. I am best known for my babka (a sweetened, yeasted bread that is twisted and baked with a variety of different fillings), but I am constantly playing in the kitchen and therefore often offer a variety of other breads, snack cakes, cookies, and seasonal treats as well.

Ahava Dough Company was officially born in 2020—along with my third child—right in the midst of the pandemic. And, while baking has been a lifelong passion of mine, I had never really considered opening a cottage bakery until I was strongly encouraged to do so by many folks right here in the neighborhood



When most of the world was shut down early in the pandemic, I, like so many others at that time, found an outlet in my kitchen. I baked on a daily basis, often sharing photos of my creations with neighbors in a Circle C Facebook group dedicated to cooking. Eventually, nearly every time I posted a photo, I would receive messages from folks who offered to buy my bakes. At a certain point it just didn’t make sense to *not* take that leap.



So now, two and a half years later, I am unbelievably grateful to not only be baking at the Bakers’ Bazaars, but also for many in the community on a weekly basis. It is a true joy to get to know the families in our neighborhood, an honor to bake for them and their special occasions, and a pleasure to be part of this supportive group of Circle C cottage bakers. This group is the embodiment of “community over competition” and I couldn’t be more grateful to be a part of it.

Ahava Dough Company may be reached via Facebook or Instagram @AhavaDoughCo.

As a reminder, the next Circle C Bakers’ Bazaar is on Saturday, February 11, 2023. Please stop by and see these lovely ladies and check out their tempting, scratch-made baked goods. Bakers interested in participating in future bazaars as a guest baker, please feel free to reach out to Susan at CookiePlantATX@gmail.com or Lauren at BlueDoorSweets@gmail.com

Last, our Circle C bakers would like to thank our wonderful neighbors. As Susan so eloquently states, “The tremendous support from Circle C has been felt so much! We truly appreciate everyone who has come out to shop local and support small businesses in their own community.”

Please join us on February 11, 2023, at the Circle C Community Center, stop by and say hello.



THE HOLIDAYS ARE OVER! NOW, WHAT ABOUT THAT TRASH?

Did you know that—from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day—Americans generate 25% more trash per day than at any other time of the year?

The average American produces 4.9 pounds of trash per day. This amounts to roughly 34 pounds of trash per person—per week according to the most recent statistic of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). However, the data used for that study was collected in 2018. Back then, Amazon’s reported annual revenues reached *only* \$232,887 million. Fast forward to today, four years later. Amazon’s reported revenues for 2022 has soared to an average of \$1.29 billion a day! That’s a LOT of cardboard boxes, single-use, plastic envelopes, and air bag cushioning (even for non-fragile items like clothes)!

Given Amazon’s affinity for overpackaging—and American’s obsession with Amazon—the estimated daily production of trash for the average American may have risen to approximately 5.91 pounds. That’s approximately 41.37 pounds of trash per week for each person in your household.

Add the 25% holiday increase, and we are now up to 7.38 pounds per day or 51.71 pounds a week for one person during the holidays. A family of four would then generate over 206 pounds of holiday waste in only one week. So, how can we reduce our daily amount of produced trash during the holidays? Funny you should ask! Below are a few suggestions.

Four Effective Ways to Reduce holiday Waste:

There are several steps we can take to reduce the amount of waste we produce, many of which are opportunities provided to us by the City of Austin (CoA) as part of their effort to reduce the amount of waste produced in our city. The CoA has issued a “Zero Waste Goal,” stating that they hope to “reach Zero Waste by 2040, which means reducing the amount of trash sent to area landfills by 90%.”

This is a lofty goal and one in which we, as citizens, might want to consider joining to help our planet. The first step toward this goal is to reduce the amount of trash we generate by reusing or repurposing items, then composting or recycling the rest. Below are four ways we can help with this effort.

1. TURN YOUR HOLIDAY TREE INTO MULCH!

In past years, recycling trees for Austin residents required taking a trip to Zilker Park—with holiday trees strapped to the cars—for drop off. There, trees were inspected to ensure they are free of decorations or flocking, and accepted trees were piled for mulching and free distribution at a later day



Luckily for us, our weekly CoA Curbside Composting Collection trucks now pick up natural holiday trees from the curb in front of our Circle C houses. Trees should be placed by the curb by 5:30 a.m. and must be free all of decorations (no tinsel, flocking, decorations, or plastic anywhere on the tree). Trees that do not adhere to the above rules will be left at the curb. Please do not bag the trees.

Austinites without curbside collection still have the option to drop off their trees at Zilker with the same restrictions. Dates for holiday tree drop offs at Zilker are Saturday, December 31, 2022; Saturday, January 7, 2023; and Sunday, January 8, 2023, during the hours of 10 a.m.–2 p.m. The CoA will pile all accepted trees to mulch at a later date and will offer the mulch, free of charge, on a first-come, first-served basis beginning at 9 a.m. on Thursday, January 12, 2023. Tools and/or containers for transporting the mulch will not be provided, so please be prepared with your own.

For those inclined to volunteer, the CoA is requesting help during the tree drop-offs: directing cars, ensuring all trees are clean and free of decorations, and helping transport trees to the pile of accepted trees. Volunteers will work only 2-hour shifts (10 a.m.–12 p.m. or 12 p.m.–2 p.m.) and will receive a volunteer staff t-shirt and a boxed lunch, courtesy of HEB Central Market. More information and the online volunteer sign-up are available at: <https://www.austintexas.gov/treerecycling>. Questions or concerns may be emailed to: meredith.gauthier@austintexas.gov.

The free holiday tree mulch holds many benefits for implementation in the yard, such as:

- The CoA holiday tree mulch should contain a mixture of shredded pine, spruce, and fir trees. Needles from these trees are acidic, so adding them in mulch will be appreciated by most flowering plants requiring a lower pH to better bloom. Although, much dispute exists about whether a soil's pH level could be significantly altered simply by adding acidic mulch.
- Shredded mulch from these holiday trees will not wash away like bark chips do. They tend to stay put, so can be applied on the many slopes in the neighborhood.
- Mulching in early January helps to insulate and protect our plants from our growing number of Texas freezes.
- Tree mulch also works well in conjunction with cardboard to act as a weed barrier. Directions for this are below.

2. REPURPOSE CARBOARD BOXES: HELP OUR SOIL'S ECOSYSTEM



Now is a good time to repurpose those multiple Amazon boxes, soda-can boxes, toilet paper holders, and brown packing papers as well as other paper (like junk mail). Well, yesterday would have actually been better, but today will work too! Rather than being tossed into the blue recycle bins, cardboard boxes could easily be repurposed to insulate, feed, and protect our plants as well as our earthworms.

This is because cardboard contains both nitrogen and carbon, both of which are good for plants and loved by earthworms. In fact, worm farms exist that feed only shredded, moistened cardboard to their worms. Their theory is that the glue used to hold corrugated cardboard together is comprised of cornstarch which, combined with the cardboard's nitrogen and carbon, creates enough nutrients for the worms.

Cardboard also possesses hygroscopic properties. In other words, cardboard absorbs water, holding onto it in wet conditions and releasing it when heat is present, or when plants most need it. Because plants and earthworms prefer moist, but not soggy soil, the cardboard helps to create a goldilocks environment for these beneficial living creatures.

Yet another benefit of cardboard in the garden is the assistance it provides in extreme temperatures. Corrugated cardboard contains air pockets that hold the heat in winter and allow air flow in the heat of summer.

Earthworms therefore flock to cardboard for its nutrients, water, and insulating properties. When traveling to and from the cardboard, earthworms move along by opening their mouths, swallowing soil, then passing it through their body and out their end, propelling them forward. They literally eat their way through. Their digestive system processes the food, taking in needed nutrients, then excretes what is not needed. Because this process unlocks nitrogen and phosphorus in the soil, the manure (castings) of earthworms, with its highly concentrated nutrients, is a favorite food of most plants. Accordingly, studies show that worm castings contain four times the amount of phosphorus than in surface soil. Not only that, but the tunnels they create while eating their way through the soil, leaves behind loosened areas with air pockets so that plant and tree roots are encouraged to grow toward the easily accessible, nutrient-rich worm castings. Increased root growth then strengthens plants, allowing for increased access to food and water.

Repurposed cardboard boxes in our gardens thus holds the ability to strengthen the ecosystem of the soil and surrounding plants. To use them as a weed barrier, follow the steps below.

Directions for sheet mulching (or “lasagna layering”) cardboard in the garden:

- Remove all plastic tape and stickers from cardboard, flatten it, and place directly onto the grass or weeds.
- Overlap the cardboard in a pattern so that the middle of the top layer covers the corners of the cardboard below, trapping the existing weeds and grass so that the ground cannot be seen.
- Repeat this pattern until the cardboard is at least 6 layers deep.
- On top of the layered cardboard, place an organic compost that will provide beneficial fungi to surrounding trees and plants. Organic compost may be purchased at stores like Natural Gardener or Lowes, or you can create your own using dried leaves, food scraps, pine straw, and other organic matter.
- On the compost, place a thick layer of wood chips or shredded wood that does not break down easily, like the free mulch provided by the CoA on January 12. Cedar mulch repels insects and take longer to decompose than others, so would be good to add to the holiday tree mulch.
- Adding corn gluten on top helps to prevent pesky new weeds from germinating, so keeps the garden area looking nice.
- This step is controversial, but some gardeners recommend placing clear or black plastic on top to “solarize” the ground beneath so that temperatures in the summer reach a point that is difficult for weeds underneath to grow.
- Be careful to keep all materials and mulch a minimum of 3 inches (for small plants) to 6 inches (for larger plants) away from the stems and trunks to allow room to breathe and grow without touching stagnant moisture.

3. FILL UP THAT GREEN COMPOST BIN EACH COMPOST FOOD SCRAPS TO MINIMIZE LANDFILL WASTE

“If it grows, it goes!” Austin’s Curbside Composting is fond of using their slogan as a reminder for us to place all living—or once living—items in our green composting bins, rescuing them from the fate of a landfill.

Educating the public on which items may be placed in our blue recycle bins, green compost bins, or brown bins is a large part of Austin’s Zero Waste Goal initiative. Because, while everything placed in the brown trash bins is sent to landfills, items placed in blue bins and green bins are recycled and reused.

“A recent study showed that almost half of everything residential customers send to the landfill could have been composted,” explains the CoA website. “Compostable material cannot break down in a landfill as it would in nature or in a compost pile. Instead, it decomposes without oxygen [in the landfill], releasing harmful methane into the atmosphere.”

Composting is the aerobic process of microorganisms (such as beneficial bacteria and yeasts) breaking down natural, organic matter into its basic components. This results in an easier, more direct access to essential nutrients for surrounding plants. Our part in the composting process is to provide more natural, organic matter (cut grass, fallen leaves, leftover fruits and vegetables) In an aerobic environment, one with free oxygen present, the carbon in the soil oxidizes (or combines with oxygen) to produce both carbon dioxide (CO₂) and energy (in the form of heat), along with a small amount of methane (CH₄). The CO₂ is readily absorbed by plants, particularly during photosynthesis.

Conversely, in a less ideal anaerobic environment, with a lack of oxygen atoms, carbon atoms instead turn to hydrogen atoms to combine, forming methane (CH₄): a colorless, odorless, and highly flammable gas that is a large contributor to greenhouse gases and thus, global warming. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website, “Direct methane emissions released to the atmosphere (without burning) are about 25 times more powerful than CO₂ in terms of their warming effect on the atmosphere.”

Landfills are purposely kept dry and air-tight because they contain dangerous by-products that, if leaked, can contaminate our earth, damaging our soils and ground water. This method is effective until organic matter is added to the mix. Then, the combination of organic matter decomposing and an anaerobic environment produces high amounts of toxic methane.

Because of the CoA’s dedication to their Zero Waste Goal, the contents of our green bins are outsourced to a local, commercial composting facility with the ability to use extremely high temperatures that will sanitize and break down hard-to-compost items. So, meat, dairy, and seafood products are, surprisingly, accepted as compostable. Normally that products are a big no-no in composting, not only because of their repulsive smells emitted as they rot, but also because their smell attracts rats and flies that contribute to the presence of maggots and harmful bacteria (like E. coli, Listeria, and Salmonella). These by-products can contaminate the surrounding soil and possibly harm plants and wildlife.

So, yes, Austin residents may indeed place all dinner leftovers in the green bins, although please don’t put meat, dairy, or seafood products in your home garden. Your neighbors might not appreciate the putrid smells or the unwelcome guests they attract.



ITEMS ACCEPTED IN CITY OF AUSTIN GREEN COMPOST BINS

A recent study showed that almost half of everything residential customers send to the landfill could have been composted. Compostable material cannot break down in a landfill, as it would in nature or in a compost pile. Instead, it decomposes without

Food Scraps

•Meat & Poultry (cooked/raw, including bones) •Seafood (cooked/raw, including bones) •Dairy products (including cheese) •Fruits •Vegetables •Grains •Pasta •Eggshells •Bread •Coffee grounds •Tea bags •Tea leaves •Baked goods •Nuts •Candy •Snack foods •Leftovers •Spoiled food

Yard Trimmings

•Grass clippings •Flowers •Leaves •Plants •Small branches and tree limbs * •Tree roots •Straw

Natural Fibers

•Popsicle sticks •Sawdust (in paper bags) •Pet fur/hair •Shredded paper (in paper bags) •Toothpicks •Wooden chopsticks •Untreated wood

Food Scraps

•Meat & Poultry (cooked/raw, including bones) •Seafood (cooked/raw, including bones) •Dairy products (including cheese) •Fruits •Vegetables •Grains •Pasta •Eggshells •Bread •Coffee grounds •Tea bags •Tea leaves •Baked goods •Nuts •Candy •Snack foods •Leftovers •Spoiled food

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Food-Soiled Paper

•Paper bags •Paper napkins •Paper towels •Paper plates •Paper cups •Paper containers and take-out boxes (without wax or plastic lining, and with any metal or plastic removed) •Pizza boxes •Coffee filters •Microwavable popcorn bags •Newspaper •Tissues •Paper bags •Paper

Also, it is highly recommended that all food products, but most importantly meat, dairy, and seafood products, be kept in the freezer until the morning of compost pickup. Please do not place any plastic or other nonbiodegradable bags in the compost bins. Bins must be placed by the curbside, five or more feet away from other items, by 5:30 a.m. on pickup day.

4. SPEAK OUT AGAINST NON-BIODEGRADABLE PRODUCTS INCLUDING AMAZON'S PLASTIC "RECYCLABLE" MAILERS



You know those ubiquitous blue and white Amazon bubble-lined plastic mailers with the “recycle” symbol on them? And those brown paper mailers with the “recycle” symbol on the paper and plastic bubble-lining inside? Well, they are actually not recyclable. Please, do not place them in our blue, recycle bins.

Oceana, a nonprofit dedicated to preserve and restore the earth’s oceans, has issued a statement about Amazon’s use of plastic mailers and bubble-lining, “Though it is lightweight, this plastic practically never biodegrades and poses a threat to ocean ecosystems that bear the brunt of plastic pollution. It’s also the type of trash that marine animals—like sea turtles—too often mistake for food.”

Although Amazon has partnered with How2Recycle, a labeling company with goals to “provide a labeling system designed to follow the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and Competition Bureau Canada’s guidance,” the labels placed on the products are somewhat misleading. This is because they use the easily recognizable recycle symbol—the mobius loop containing 3 triangles headed in a clockwise direction—for all products they label, whether or not the product is biodegradable. So, most people will see the mobius loop on the products and assume all products stamped with this symbol may be placed in recycle bins. They may not.



Above are the 4 versions of the recycle symbols used by How2Recycle. Unfortunately, only the first symbol, with no writing inside the mobius loop, represents biodegradable products accepted by most recycling centers. The others are either not recyclable at all or require checking with stores or various locations to find one that will accept the products to recycle. This is not always easy to do because these products tend to contain toxic plastics and, according to Oceana, “are very difficult, if not impossible, to recycle.”

Luckily, Austin provides an option. Our Austin Resource Recovery Center, at 2514 Business Center Drive, accepts almost all of these products as well as other non-recyclables like Styrofoam (except packing peanuts), batteries, cell phones, microwaves, scrap metal, and all plastic bags that are clean and dry.



Because of the plastic pollution problem in India that, according to

TechCrunch+, generated an average of 9.4 million tons of plastic waste a year (which remained uncollected and unmanaged, spilling over onto streets and in water bodies), Amazon halted all single-use plastic shipping products in India’s fulfillment centers beginning in June 2020. They then began an India-first initiative, offering Packaging-Free Shipping (PFS) to hundreds of cities in India. So, it can be done.

Oceana believes that Amazon’s customers in America and around the world should be provided plastic-free mailing options for shipping and has started a petition requesting this. Please consider signing and sharing this petition:

<https://www.change.org/p/amazon-com-get-amazon-to-offer-plastic-free-packaging-options>

In 2021 alone, Amazon reported that it used 97,222 metric tons of single-use plastic! In addition to signing the above petition, concerned Amazon patrons may call their customer service number at 888-280-4331 and request no plastic in their packaging or even Packaging-Free Shipping.

Even our beloved HEB continues its use of plastic bags, although they offer cloth or brown paper bag options for their upscale Central Market stores. We can write them ask that they provide these same cloth or brown paper bag options at all HEB stores in addition to their Central Market stores. Their customer service email address is: News@HEB.com.

By voicing our opinions to companies that still use single-use plastics and questioning the company about their practices, we can make it uncomfortable for large corporations to continue their contributions to single-use plastics. And together, we can make a difference for our planet.