

LATEST HEADLINES

Rachel Kippen, Our Ocean Backyard | The Wild Compost Women of DeLaveaga





Liz Milazzo, from left, Kelly Archer, and Katie Hansen collaborate together on neighborhood composting. (De La Compost/Contributed)

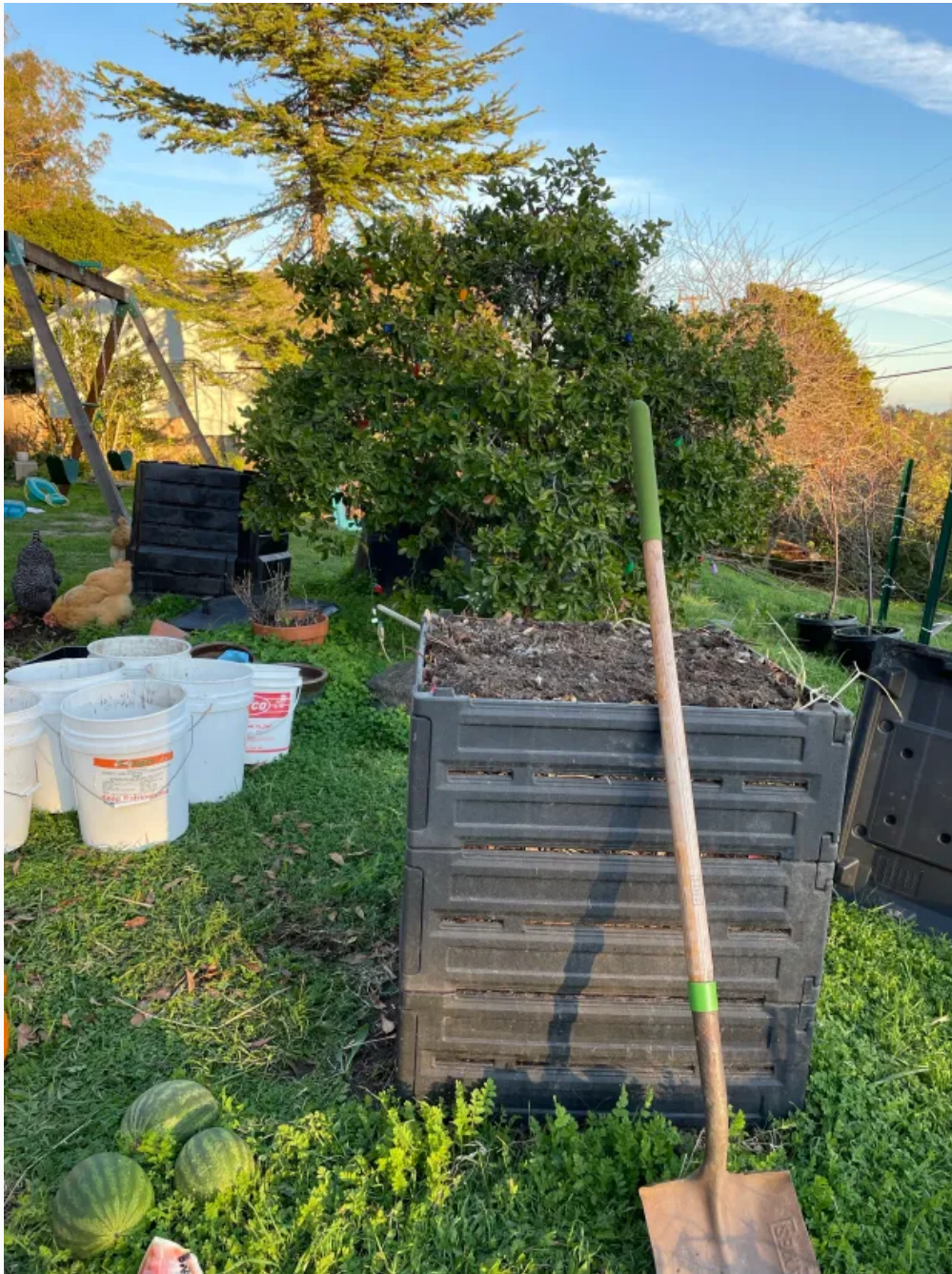
By **RACHEL KIPPEN** |

February 5, 2022 at 3:00 p.m.

Growing up, my mom would read me a children’s book called “The Wild Washerwomen” about seven close friends – Dottie, Lottie, Molly, Dolly, Winnie, Minnie and Ernestine – who washed their entire town’s laundry. The women were strong, fearless, innovative and took to solving their community’s issues such as getting rid of dirty laundry on their own terms.

De La Compost, a women-led neighborhood composting group, reminds me of this story. Kelly Archer, Katie Hansen and Liz Milazzo are the female masterminds behind an all-volunteer, 30-household food scrap collection network that serves the Prospect Heights/Delaveaga region with three compost locations.

Composting supports the health of Monterey Bay by creating nutrient-rich soil for home gardens and crop production while reducing the use of fertilizers, therefore decreasing fertilizer run-off into the ocean which contributes to algal blooms and dead zones. Backyard composting keeps waste close to home, lowering transportation emissions, which just so happen to be our largest source of emissions in the city and county of Santa Cruz. Lastly, it diverts waste from landfills and minimizes landfill emissions that contribute to climate change, warming oceans, and ocean acidification.



Empty buckets for participants and a full compost pile at one of De La Compost's host sites. (De La Compost/Contributed)

“De La Compost is a network of folks that would like to prevent their food waste from going to the landfill. It began with Kelly distributing fliers in the DeLaveaga neighborhood inviting people to save their food scraps for a community composting network. Everything grew from her dedication and enthusiasm,” says Milazzo.

“Food scraps are dropped off to one of the three compost host sites: Liz’s, Katie’s, or

“Many neighbors who contribute food scraps live within a block or two of their host site. Participants are provided an empty five gallon bucket, typically sourced second-hand from Ferrell’s Donut Shop. When their bucket is full, they bring it over to their host site to exchange it for a new empty bucket,” adds Hansen. “We take all kitchen scraps except meat or dairy.”

De La Compost’s exemplary efforts align with the waste diversion objectives of the City of Santa Cruz, which has been ramping up its programming to adhere to California Senate Bill 1383. “The common goal of SB1383 will be to keep food scraps and edible food out of the landfill,” says Caylie Soon, City of Santa Cruz Waste Reduction Assistant. The policy, passed in 2016 to provide lead time prior to implementation, focuses on addressing climate change through greenhouse gas emissions reductions. The City of Santa Cruz will provide food scrap collection containers to businesses and residents starting this year.

“Businesses that fall into certain tiers defined by CalRecycle will be required to donate edible food rather than throwing it away,” says Soon. “Jurisdictions throughout California are working hard to roll-out, implement, and develop programs to meet these mandates.”

“We anticipate having our Food Scrap Collection Program fully implemented within the City by the end of 2022, including for residents living in multi-unit buildings,” Soon tells me. “Residents can help by ensuring that they keep the containers free of contaminants. Only food scraps will be accepted; no yard waste, no paper products, and no compostable single-use food ware,” says Soon. “We are lucky here in the City, as scraps will primarily be turned into biogas and used as fuel for the wastewater treatment plant near Neary Lagoon, or alternatively will be sent to a facility in Santa Clara and turned into animal feed. As you may imagine, anything but food in these programs would cause problems in the finished product.”

“The number one step the community can take to help the City divert food scraps from landfill is to prevent wasted food in the first place. Don’t over-purchase when you shop. Make sure to store food for longevity, feed your friends and animals, and learn how to interpret date labels. Beyond these steps, composting as close to home as possible, such as in your backyard or sharing the load with your neighborhood as modeled by De La Compost, is a wonderful way to reduce the carbon footprint associated with food,” says Soon.

“Community composting is a great way to get to know your neighbors or just to have

“Our homestead model is excellent for neighborhoods with lots that have a little extra space, such as single family and duplex home neighborhoods. With higher density housing, the system will have to look different, such as centralized composting in a common space,” says Archer. “We’ve found that 5-10 participants per host site is a good balance. We hope De La Compost can serve our entire neighborhood one day. We think it’s great that the City will launch their curbside pickup, but we plan to continue our program because we love the community it creates and that we end up with usable compost, plus there’s no trucks driving the waste around.”

Archer enjoys the friendships and sense of unity among composters, especially through the many hardships of the past few years. “Our neighborhood also has a Firewise group which adds to the cohesion of the neighborhood as a whole. We’ve discussed starting an emergency preparedness group, too. There are so many ways we can build community and support each other.” De La Compost is part of the [Community Composter Coalition](#), nationally organized by the Institute for Local Self Reliance.

Archer and former County of Santa Cruz Recycling Coordinator Jeffrey Smedberg started [Cruz Compost](#), an email group for compost-enthusiasts in the Santa Cruz area to share resources and ask questions. Those interested in learning more about De La Compost can email delacompost@gmail.com.

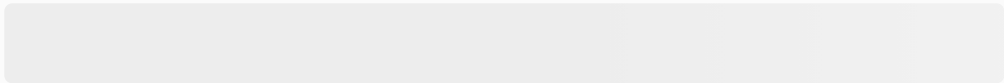
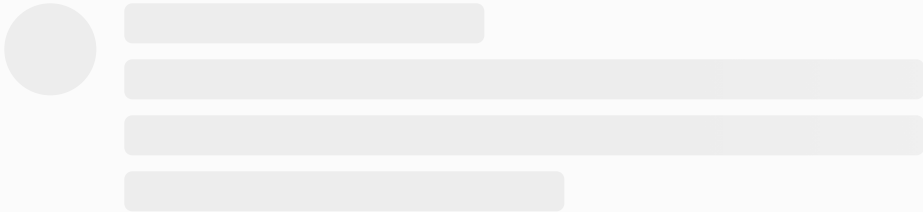
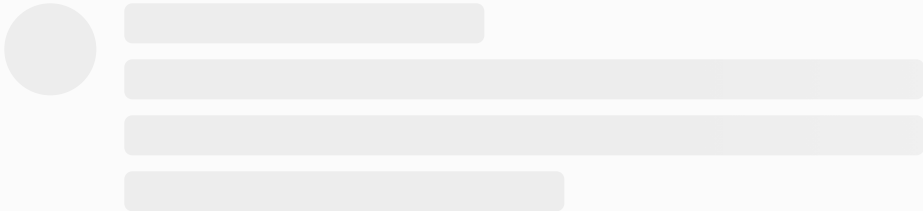
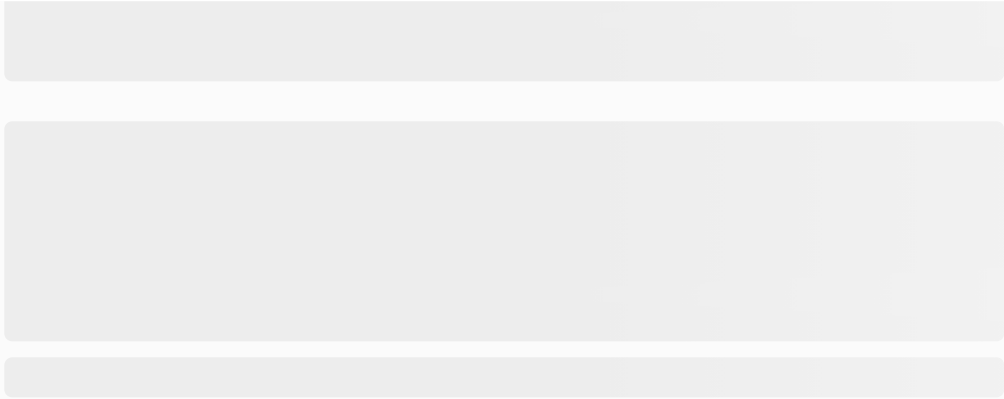
And just like the children’s book, 2022 seems to be the year we can yell with glee, “Look out, the wild compost women are coming!”

Rachel Kippen is an ocean educator and sustainability advocate in Santa Cruz County and can be reached at newsroom@santacruzsentinel.com.

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Rachel Kippen



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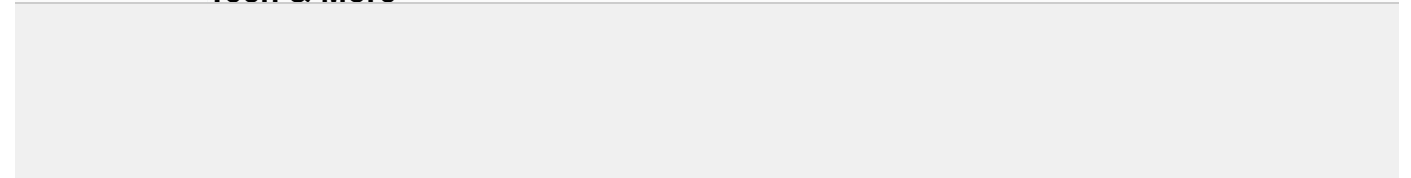
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