



BLUE EARTH COMPOST

Anything That Grows, Goes

STORY BY SAYZIE KOLDYS PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLUE EARTH COMPOST

When I lived in the city, I wished for space to compost. Now that I have space, I haven't produced anything I can use in the garden. Instead of dark, nutrient-rich material, I'm knee-deep in mold, slugs, and fruit flies. I add leaves, but it's mostly to cover the smell. I read about compost pH and moisture management from the safety of my office. I think about turning the pile more often than I actually do. Any of that sound familiar? Enter Alex Williams and Sam King, the Blue Earth Dudes.

Blue Earth Compost, which picks up compostable materials from homes, businesses, and events, and delivers compost in return, was the brainchild of Susannah Castle. But when her husband was transferred across the country in the spring of 2014, she sold the fledgling business to her volunteer associate, Alex Williams. Williams was a

recent graduate of Fordham University, where he'd majored in environmental studies and interned with a nonprofit compost organization, BIG Reuse. When presented with the opportunity to put his knowledge to use and create a job for himself, he brought his parents on board as investors and volunteers. In January, Sam King – who had worked in renewable energy for several years – signed on to help with business development and marketing. Both were drawn to the tangible nature of the work and to the impact composting has on a community.

Composting, according to Williams and King, can reduce household waste by 50%. In less than three years, Blue Earth has diverted more than 400,000 pounds from Connecticut's incinerators, returning it to the soil as compost, which adds nutrients and binds to soil molecules, better enabling them to filter and absorb water. Compost-

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ing facilities also provide twice the number of jobs as landfills and four times the jobs created by incinerators.

Their model is simple: a residential customer chooses a subscription and schedules weekly or bi-weekly pickups. Williams, his dad, or King retrieves the 4-gallon pail, replaces it with a clean one, and transports the contents to Harvest New England’s industrial composting facility in Ellington, which accepts bones, dairy, and even some compostable plastics and fungus-infected garden clippings not recommended for home compost piles that aren’t warm enough to kill pathogens. Three times a year, residential customers have the option to receive compost at no extra charge.

Williams aims to expand composting accessibility. In 2014, he had 20 residential customers. Now he’s approaching 100 across eight Connecticut towns, and in the spring of 2015, he launched a commercial service now utilized by nearly 30 businesses, including schools, restaurants, and New Haven’s Koffee?, owned and operated by Duncan Goodall, who says it’s a sign of a well-run company, when the customer doesn’t have to think about the process.

Goodall, like many commercial customers, doesn’t opt to receive compost. But he spent the past two years overhauling Koffee?’s waste stream, so that everything is reusable, recyclable, or compostable. “There are other services similar to Blue Earth,” he says, “but they don’t have the same moral and social leadership. Where others dabble in market-driven greenwashing, Blue Earth has an array of progressive policies. They reuse equipment from other businesses, have a strict no-idling policy for their vehicles, and recycle what they can’t compost. They have reasonable pricing, and you can feel good about what you’re doing. These guys are the consummate professionals.”

Another of Blue Earth’s progressive initiatives is reflected in their status as a Benefit Corporation, which is a legal framework that holds business owners accountable to social and environmental goals, as well as financial ones. reSET, a social enterprise trust dedicated to developing social entrepreneurship in Connecticut, was instrumental in their certification process, and in October 2016, Blue Earth was a winner of reSET’s Social Impact Challenge, designed to bring funding and attention to innovative startups.

Williams and King will use the \$10,000 award and publicity to



Left to right, Alex Williams and Sam King.



grow the business. “We doubled our revenue in 2016 and hope to double it again in 2017,” says King.

They’ve created Blue Earth Dinners, where they highlight the culinary skills of their loyal composters by dining with them and blogging about the experience. They’re planning a door-to-door campaign, and their dream is to run their

own compost facility, where they’ll employ people from disadvantaged communities or those, like veterans and the previously incarcerated, who’ve had difficulty finding jobs elsewhere.

Despite the mounting accolades, Williams remains modest. It’s all “pretty decent for a couple of guys and my 65-year-old dad.”

> *Blue Earth Compost: West Hartford; 860-266-7346; blueearthcompost.com*

Sayzie Koldys is a writer/editor with an MA from UNH and an MFA from BSU. She learned to love acronyms while working with scientists aboard an educational tall ship in the South Pacific, where she provisioned with local island produce for up to six weeks at sea and prepared six meals a day for up to forty people. She’s interested in the intersections of food, culture, and science, particularly when they interact near the ocean. You can read more at Opercula.net and SayzieJane.com. Follow her on Twitter @SayzieJane.