

In April the SCHS hosted Michael Martinez, the founder and executive director of LA Compost, to present a webinar on “Composting for Climate and Community Resiliency.” As stated on his website, they “work cooperatively with a diverse network of partners within Los Angeles County to co-create spaces for local compost access and engagement, regenerative practices, and community empowerment.” He also spoke about the significance of composting for both soil and human health, citing LA Compost’s mission “to restore lost connections to the soil and to one another.”

Martinez is a former elementary school teacher and a certified Master Gardener who saw a need and a desire in people to understand the soil food web and to close the loop connecting where their food comes from to what happens to scraps after consumption. He established LA Compost in 2013 and has grown the organization from a group of volunteers collecting organics using bicycles to a paid staff of six full-time and eleven part-time employees. Presently, they oversee a county-wide decentralized network of over 30 compost hubs which are all in partnership with communities, non-profits and other organizations committed to healthy ecosystems and are also inclusive of food access and community engagement.

Photo courtesy of speaker.



After briefly describing composting basics, including materials, various methods, and the benefits of the process, Martinez talked about how community-based composting works and what LA Compost does to facilitate sharing the finished product. Donations of compostable materials are received at their hubs via local partnerships – keeping these materials including wood chips, sawdust, newspaper, coffee grounds, eggshells and more out of landfills – along with the typical dry and fresh leaves, grass clippings and food scraps people who compost at home are familiar with. LA Compost uses an aerobic 3-bin composting process that allows microorganisms to break down materials and turn them into a nutrient-rich soil amendment. Piles are “managed under a process done with intention” and turned weekly for eventual distribution to end users at pre-scheduled times.

In addition to providing compost, the organization teaches workshops, picks up scraps from farmers markets, coordinates drop-off times/sites across the city, and fosters the sharing of knowledge, seeds, and food. Currently Martinez is working on growing regional efforts, such as offering co-op members the opportunity to become “compost cultivators” to increase outreach (link here), targeting youth education to engage kids and get them in touch with nature, as well as participating in the “Partner Initiatives” under mayor Garcetti’s environmental plans for Los Angeles.

In conclusion, Martinez summed up his belief in the benefits of

composting for our collective future with the following words, “Compost is an embodiment of resilience, as it contributes to health and wholeness within our living system. In the same way that compost requires balance with its ingredients and overall environmental conditions, we also require this balance... knowing that we are part of a larger human network.”

To become involved or just discover what composting options might work for you, click here to link to an overview of LA Compost’s program.

🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

FOLLOW-UP: After the program, the SCHS reached out to Martinez with a few questions from members inquiring how compost is distributed and at what scale. He explained that at community hubs, all finished compost stays onsite for local growers who are engaging with the greenspace that is hosting the bin. For regional hubs, the finished compost is split three ways: one third staying onsite for the park/urban farm to use, another third going to local growers throughout the year, and the final portion being distributed for use in special projects close to where the compost was made. Going forward, as the scale and processing capacity of LA Compost’s program increases, so will their ability to distribute more finished material to the public. 🌀

To watch this program on YouTube, click the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKKjesW1OZ8>

SCHS MONTHLY GARDEN SHARE

During this time of active growth and changing temperatures, let’s:

- Continue dead-heading our repeat bloomers and annuals
- Begin potting up those succulent pups & cuttings – but don’t forget to harden them off first
- Monitor for increased water needs – especially for container plants
- Manage pests and rampant growth in our veggie patches to help us produce the best produce we can
- Cut back on irrigation of summer-dormant California native species
- Plant squash and melons now
- Keep adding to, watering in, and turning that compost pile!

🌀 Sabine Steinmetz

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