

MASSACHUSETTS PUSHES

Are worms the answer? Composters dish the dirt

Meet the top dog in topsoil

By LAURA CRIMALDI

No one's making the same mistakes the Romans and other ancient civilizations did with topsoil in Bruce Fulford's Roslindale neighborhood.

They're composting. "It's a fairly common practice," said Fulford, owner of City Soil & Greenhouse Co. "I would say more people in this neighborhood compost than not."

Fulford grew up on a small farm with an older brother who engaged in composting races to see how quickly he could transform raw material into dirt.

But composting took on a whole new dimension for Fulford after he read "Topsoil and Civilization," an academic survey of world history that illustrates how the ancient empires of Rome and Mesopotamia came undone by destroying agricultural resources.

"They cut down their forest and did not preserve their topsoil. They had to become warrior societies to conquer more lands and go farther and farther for their wheat and wine," said Fulford. "We are suffering from serious soil erosion in this country. Composting is one



STAFF PHOTO BY TED FITZGERALD

TAKE A FLYING HEAP: Bruce Fulford composts in Roslindale.

thing you can do to save your soil."

Fulford built an 8-by-4-foot composting area in his back yard. It takes about a year to generate enough matter to spread over the family's 11,000-square-foot lot.

Professionally, Fulford acts as a consultant for municipalities, companies and the state and also

does landscape design and architecture.

"We don't look at this as a financial savings. It's more of a quality of life issue," he said. "It's part of a societal trend to first start literally in your own back yard. Then changes begin at home and those changes have bigger impact."

Cambridge composter is a wonder wormer

By LAURA CRIMALDI

When Randi Mail conducts worm composting how-to workshops, she fields lots of questions.

How do they breathe? How do they eat? How do they sleep? And most importantly, can the creepy crawlers escape?

"A big question is 'Will the worms leave the bin?'" said Mail, Cambridge's recycling director.

"The answer is no." Mail, a Cambridge apartment dweller, began composting her household organic waste with worms several years ago after observing Peace Corps friends in Guatemala employ the technique.

Using Mary Appelhof's book "Worms Eat My Garbage" as a guide, Mail drilled small holes in a 10-gallon plastic bin, ripped up newspapers for "bedding" and welcomed 40

red wigglers into her pantry for a compost feast.

Three years later, Mail has elegant amaryllis and other plants potted in her homegrown compost and regularly teaches workshops in schools and the Harvest Co-op Market in Cambridge.

"You get students.

You get housewives. You get young professionals," said Mail, who composts five pounds a week at home, saving that weight in carbon through her efforts. "It's part of a more sustainable lifestyle. Good recyclers want to go to the next step."



STAFF PHOTO BY PATRICK WHITTEMORE

YOU'VE GOT MAIL: Randi Mail shows off her wigglers in her Cambridge digs.



STAFF PHOTO BY MARK GARFINKEL

AMERICAN GOTHIC: Virginia and Frank Camporesi were honored by Mayor Menino for their green efforts at their Allston home.

Couple loves each other, Earth

By LAURA CRIMALDI

Peek in the trash of Virginia and Frank Camporesi and you'll never find a scrap of food.

That's because their table scraps go to the bird feeder, neighborhood golden retriever Bubba chomps the bones and the rest is piled into a backyard compost heap. "This is the golden box, black gold," said Virginia, 63, standing by a wood lattice outdoor composter that her husband built.

The Camporesis' Allston home is a virtual lab for urban sustainable living; they were honored earlier this year with a green award from Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

Their flower patches bloom with roses, dahlias and wisteria planted in compost and are hydrated with soapy water diverted from the couple's washing machine.

Even in late October, their vegetable garden is fresh with the aromas of basil, escarole and ripe tomatoes that were bedded with grass clippings they collected from neighbors. "It's really not a back-breaking job to do," said Frank, 66, who learned his eco-friendly ways out of necessity growing up in the tiny town of Musellaro, Italy, near the Adriatic Sea.

He introduced Virginia, a "city girl," to this way of life and together they make Earth-saving efforts such as hang-drying clothing, using energy-efficient windows, toilets and appliances and recycling.

Virginia jokes that it's a little bit like the TV reality show "Living With Ed," starring eco-obsessed actor Ed Begley Jr.

"He's my Ed," she said with a smile.

Frank replied: "I could arrange something."