

# Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Food?

By Maci Gambrell

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Bathed in the fading sunlight of an October afternoon sat a 10-foot-tall hill of broken branches, leaves and kitchen scraps. In a field off Centerpoint Road just outside San Marcos, oyster shells glistened in the amber light and English muffins decorated the sides of the pyramid of discarded food. Steam wafted from the pile with the smell of wet napkins as a man watched a metamorphosis happen before his eyes.



Food turned to soil at Bobcat Blend  
Compost site on Center Point Road  
Nov. 3 2025 by Maci Gambrell

“I think it is romantic. There is so much life in those piles,” Matt McGinnis, a student worker for Bobcat Blend said. “Food isn’t wasted; it’s just food for microbes.”

Off to the right lay a finer, more uniform pile with a slight earthy smell with a sign behind it that read “finished compost.”

In an environment of people increasingly naïve about food waste, Bobcat Blend students are doing the thankless job of turning discarded food into new beginnings.

“I only started composting because our planet is on fire and we were flushing [our food] all down the sewer. And so, I was like, we should be composting that,” Dr. Tina Cade, Horticultor professor and creator of Bobcat Blend said, from behind the potted plants that covered her desk.

Back in 2009, Cade saw an opportunity to turn harvested invasive plants into compost, instead of trash in a landfill because she recognized the impact organic waste had on the atmosphere.

Globally, about [one third](#) of food is sent to landfills, where it releases up to 10% of the world’s greenhouse gases.

Texas State became one of the first universities in the state to start composting. Through Bobcat Blend, between 1,000 and 1,500 pounds of food per day is diverted from garbage dumps and instead composted into soil to help nourish plants around Texas State.

“We’re turning waste into fertility,” McGinnis said. “Something that people would dump in a landfill or just have no idea what to do with it, we’re turning it into an amendment and a final product.”

All campus kitchens, minus LBJ, start by collecting peels, rinds and other food prepping waste. Then, on and off-campus restaurants, along with a few dining halls, add customers’ leftover food

scraps and paper napkins to make a coleslaw-like mixture for Bobcat Blend student workers to pick up.

Grounds keepers and gardening staff then add leaves, grinded tree limbs, and grass clippings and deliver these second key ingredients to the composting site on Center Point Road.

After dumping out 13 recycle bins full of leftovers and chucking out plastic cups as their shoes squish into the pile, students then use a front loader to churn the pile together.

“Yeah, so we're gonna mix all the food wastes with browns, browns are just materials that are high in carbon, so wood chips, leaves, stuff like that,” McGinnis said. “And then once the microbes finish eating all this stuff. They're gonna start calming down.”

After sitting for six months, the soil turns rich and earthy, ready to be sold, or used in gardens around campus. This creates a cycle of organic nutrients without the use of harmful fertilizers, Reagan Sproull, School of Agriculture graduate instructional assistant, said.

“So, we use the compost to grow [plants]. When we cut things off our plants, then it goes back to Bobcat Blend,” Sproull said.

“We're all about reduce, reuse, recycle.”

Along with helping to reduce greenhouse gas emission, compost is also better for plants compared to traditional soil, Sproull said, as a tree she helped cultivate swayed beside her.

“The compost that’s there it helps with water retention; it helps with building the soil structure. It also increases microbial activities,” Sproull said. “And so, it helps the plants. It’s just all one big cycle.”

Despite all its benefits, compost can be a controversial topic due to two concerns: whether food waste will smell bad or attract rodents. But Bobcat Blend’s daily pick-ups help to mitigate both these risks compared to traditional dumpsters, Dr. Cade said.

Bobcat Blend continues to educate people on the benefits of compost and inspire change that they believe is crucial to the future of waste management.

“Sometimes people say, oh, you can't make a difference when people are in their 20s, you know you can't teach an old dog new trick kind of thing, but we've found that actually you can make people care a little bit more about stuff,” Dr. Cade said. By “increase[ing] people's knowledge of what is compostable, then you can get them to act more on valuing that.”



*Soil product made from compost held by Matt McGinnis at Bobcat Blend composting site Nov. 3, 2025 by Maci Gambrell*