

Recycling bags pieces of kraft

Like most York Region residents, I want to co-operate. I want to cut down on what I send to landfill.

Yard waste is one of the most obvious places to make those cuts.

That's why I mulch my grass clippings and leave them on the lawn. That's why I have used a home composter since the first year I moved into my house.

But if I have to scoop rotting weeds off my driveway one more time, I might just wrap them in plastic and drop them on the doorstep of York Region's headquarters.

As anyone with a yard must know by now, the region has outlawed clear plastic bags for yard waste. We are now supposed to put them in a hard container or a kraft paper bag for curbside pickup.

I strongly suspect few people are complaining about kraft bags because most are not using them. I suspect many people are just slipping their organic stuff into their regular garbage.

Plastic contaminates the composting process, so the workers had to remove the material from the old bags. It's a lot of work.

Kraft paper bags, on the other hand, are fully compostable and empty themselves.

Usually before you get them to the curb.

The theory was these things were strong enough to stand up to the elements. Forget it, they melt in the rain.

So I store my yard waste in my garage. But by the time the monthly pickup day rolls around, the bottom of the bag has rotted from all the natural but gross processes going on inside and — boom — I get slop all over my feet.

I've tried bags from Canadian Tire and President's Choice. It makes no difference. They can't do the job the Region of York says they can do.



York Region Newspaper Group editor David Teetzel is tired of having to pick up rotting weeds from his driveway because of shoddy paper recycling bags.

So I trotted off to Canadian Tire to get a plastic container. Surprise, surprise. They had an entire aisle of plastic garbage cans stacked three shelves high. Methinks I am not alone in this yard-waste problem.

But within a week, that can is filled and I still have three weeks worth of stuff to put in the useless kraft bags.

Now, if I compost, mulch and have an average-sized yard, how much stuff are people who have big lots and don't do these things storing in their garages? How bad will it be when the leaves start falling?

All I'm putting out for collection is weeds and a few branches pruned from

my shrubs.

Why do I have so many weeds? Well, that's another story. Let's just say I have a truth-in-advertising beef with bird feed companies that label their product Niger Seed, when it should be labelled Big, Ugly Thistles that Rip Your Hands Apart When Try to Pull Them Out Seed.

Next winter I'm hanging a sign on my bird feeder that says, "Clean your plate or no dinner".

I don't believe in whining about trivial matters, but I raise this issue for a reason.

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their organic stuff into their regular garbage.

Someone offered me the helpful hint that, if you line your kraft bag with plastic, nobody will notice till it's too late.

In either case, the purpose of separate yard waste collection is defeated.

As I understand waste reduction programs, the easier and more convenient it is to participate, the more people will support it. As long as we are expected to dole out money (and kraft bags aren't cheap) for a product that doesn't work, York Region is going to have a hard time meeting its waste reduction goals.

— David Teetzel

Recycling complaints expected to rise after plastic bag ban

BY ROY GREEN
Staff Writer

In the six months since York Region banned the use of plastic bags for yard waste, there have been few complaints, the region says.

But that will likely change this fall, when people living on large, tree-lined properties have to put leaves in kraft bags or separate containers, Markham Regional Councillor Bill O'Donnell predicted.

"There hasn't been much yard waste since the ban went into effect but when the leaves start to fall, I expect the phones will start to ring," Mr. O'Donnell said. "Those kraft bags cost more than plastic bags, they don't hold as much and they don't stand up to wet weather."

Until last January, the region accepted yard waste in plastic bags but eight of the nine area municipalities approved the ban after learning the region would save \$200,000 by eliminating the possibility of plastic contamination during processing.

Only Georgina opposed the ban because kraft bags are significantly more costly, Councillor Ross Jamieson said.

"We even asked the region to allow Georgina residents to use plastic bags at least through the balance of this year, but they rejected that," Mr. Jamieson said. "We'll be stepping up yard waste collection to twice a month in the spring and fall."

Keswick resident Shirley Lawson, upset with kraft bags that begin to deteriorate while they wait for up to a month in her garage, has come up with what she calls a stop-gap solution.

"I put yard waste in a plastic bag then transfer it over to the kraft bags just before the collection day," Ms Lawson said.

Most area municipalities provide monthly pick-up during the summer and many increase that to twice-monthly service in fall and/or spring.

Vaughan collects yard waste every week in April, May, October and November and on alternate weeks in the summer.

The region has been monitoring the program in the area municipalities and there have been few complaints about soggy kraft bags, said Mike Birett, manager of program development and planning for solid waste management.

'Complaints about bag failure amount to less than 1 per cent'

Mike Birett
manager of program development and planning for solid waste management

"The biggest issue has been about collection frequencies; people want it done more often," Mr. Birett said. "Complaints about bag failure amount to less than 1 per cent."

The region says costs can be reduced if residents use reusable containers for the bulk of their yard waste and kraft bags for the remainder. The region provides stickers to mark those containers, Mr. Birett said. "The stickers are going like hotcakes; we can't keep up with the requests."

But Mr. O'Donnell says that will change about the same time as the fall colour tours end.

"It's not uncommon for me to put out 30 to 40 plastic bags in the fall. Now, I'll probably need 60 kraft bags. They also take twice the labour — you have to pick up the leaves in little bundles and stuff them in the bags, compared to stepping on a plastic bag and raking the leaves in.

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