



OCTOBER NEWSLETTER



The Zero Waste Schools newsletter will help you get your school on a path toward generating zero waste through waste prevention, recycling, composting, and food recovery. You'll also find resources that connect zero waste to healthy eating, school gardens, and environmental education and action.

Share the newsletter with friends, colleagues, and students interested in zero waste.

[Sign up for ZWS news](#)

Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in Bellwood Launches Successful Composting Program



On Thursday, September 19th, Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in Bellwood took going green to the next level. They launched a composting program that will help them significantly reduce food waste in their cafeteria and kitchen.

This is the next step in their journey to zero waste. [Seven Generations Ahead's](#) (SGA) [Zero Waste Schools](#) (ZWS) team helped launch the school's first step into waste reduction when Thurgood Marshall brought recycling and share tables to their cafeteria in the 2023-24 school year. With that step alone, they were able to divert 50% of their waste from the landfill. Now that the school is

composting, they have the potential to divert up to 90% of their waste.

"The composting initiative at Thurgood Marshall is a testament to our commitment to creating a more sustainable and environmentally conscious educational environment," said Dr. Victoria H. Stockton, Bellwood School District 88 Superintendent. "We're enthusiastic about the benefits this program will bring, from reducing waste to enhancing our students' understanding of environmental responsibility."

To read the full press release, click [HERE](#).

Green your Halloween

Check out SGA's [Green Your Halloween Guide](#) for

helpful tips on how you can make your Halloween low or even zero waste.

From costumes and trick-or-treating, to parties and pumpkins, our guide has creative ideas about how to celebrate sustainably, have fun, and save money.

Small actions can make all the difference in creating a more sustainable celebration. Try buying your pumpkins locally and composting them at the end of the season. For costumes, visit a thrift store or organize a costume swap with neighbors. Take a look at the World Wildlife Fund's tips on having a [sustainable Halloween](#). [Beyond Plastics](#) also has some ideas on how to make your Halloween experience [full of memories with less plastic](#).

Looking for more guidance? Plan your zero waste Halloween event with the help of [SGA's Zero Waste Schools Event Guide](#). The guide features general advice on eliminating waste no matter the event. For example, get volunteers to help with sorting stations, consider foods that do not require utensils, and find decorations that can be reused and repurposed.

Remember, zero waste is a path, and even small steps can make a difference!



The infographic is titled "GREEN YOUR HALLOWEEN GUIDE" and features logos for "Sustainable Communities Ahead!" and "ZERO WASTE SCHOOLS". It provides statistics on Halloween spending and offers tips for reducing waste. The tips include: buying local pumpkins, growing your own, composting pumpkins, and eating pumpkins. It also includes a small image of pumpkins.

GREEN YOUR HALLOWEEN GUIDE

Americans spent an estimated \$9 billion on Halloween in 2018, an average of \$86.79 per person. From costumes and trick-or-treating to parties and donating leftover candy, there are many ways to practice a sustainable Halloween and still have fun each fall.

Promote zero waste for the planet and save money with these tips!

PUMPKINS

Before Halloween

Buy local and don't overshop: According to the United States Department of Agriculture, [Illinois](#) harvests about 3-5 times as many pumpkins as any of the other top states. Support local farmers and connect your family with the pumpkin growing process. By visiting a local pumpkin patch, children can see for themselves how pumpkins grow and may even get to feed animals and participate in farm activities.

Even better - grow your own! Start planning now for sowing the seeds of next year's pumpkins this spring. Take into account that there are [suggested varieties](#) for carving and eating.

After Halloween

Plan ahead for your pumpkin's afterlife: Don't doom your pumpkin to eternity in a landfill! When pumpkins and other organic materials decompose in a landfill, they generate [methane](#), a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Landfills are the third largest producer of methane in the U.S., where an estimated [1.81 billion pounds of pumpkins are grown annually](#). Keep your pumpkin in the cycle of life - eat it, or compost it!

Eat your pumpkin: Give your uncarved pumpkin a second life by turning it into a key ingredient of a delicious [soup, dessert, or hot beverage](#) to enjoy on a crisp fall night. Pumpkins are high in fiber and beta carotene, add flavor, and are a great source of Vitamin A and C. You can also scoop out the pumpkin seeds and roast them for a healthy snack.

Pumpkin Smash 2024!



Don't trash it, smash it! Facilitated by our friends at [SCARCE](#), Pumpkin Smash is an annual effort to divert pumpkins from landfills by providing locations for residents to drop off jack-o-lanterns to be composted.

Some towns will SMASH on **November 2** and others will SMASH on **November 9** for twice the opportunity to compost those old pumpkins and gourds. It's a great project for school environmental or service clubs and community groups.

Interested in hosting a Pumpkin Smash at your school or in your neighborhood? Since city approvals must be submitted to your county recycling coordinator at least 30 days in advance of the event, now is the time to start planning! Refer to SCARCE's [How to Host a Pumpkin Collection](#)

guide for more information and register your site [HERE](#).

The Conscious Cafeteria Report

Single-use lunch trays, either plastic or compostable, that are used by the majority of schools in the U.S. contribute to the large amount of waste created in lunchrooms every day. Targeting these single-use trays and replacing them with a reusable option can help schools not only reduce their waste, but can also positively impact student health.

A national pilot study conducted by [Upstream](#)

and [Ahimsa](#), called [The Conscious Cafeteria Project](#), studied the economic, environmental, and health impacts on 15 schools around the country when they switched from single-use to reusable Ahimsa trays. Here are some highlights of the study results:

- 3,300 pounds of waste eliminated
- 73,747 single-use items eliminated
- \$2,800 in cost savings
- 9,747 gallons of water saved

To read the full report, click [HERE](#).



Illinois Green Ribbon Schools



The [Illinois Green Ribbon Schools Application](#) is currently accepting submissions! This program acknowledges schools with active initiatives and unwavering dedication to fostering sustainability awareness and education. In collaboration with the [Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Green Alliance](#) invites applications from schools across the state. Participating in this program provides an excellent opportunity to highlight your school's green initiatives. Schools that achieve top scores

will have the chance to be nominated for the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools program at the national level.

Contact IL Green Alliance with questions: info@illinoisgreenalliance.org or (312) 245-8300. **Submit applications to greenribbon@isbe.net by Dec. 20.**

International Compost Awareness Week 2025 poster & bookmark contests

Know any creative students who'd like to help spread the word about the benefits of composting? Encourage them to enter this year's [International Compost Awareness Week \(ICAW\) poster and video contests](#).

The contests are open now through Nov. 1, 2024. All entries should highlight the theme of ICAW 2024: **Sustainable Communities Begin with Compost!** ICAW is May 4 - 10, 2025.

Poster contest: Anyone around the world age 14 or older may enter. The winning poster will be reproduced and distributed to thousands nationwide to promote ICAW and will be featured on the Compost Research & Education Foundation website and the US Composting Council website. The winner will receive a \$500 prize.

Bookmark contest: This year, a bookmark design

contest for ages 10-13 has been introduced for younger participants. The winning design will be shared nationwide to promote composting, and the winner will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card. To read more about this contest, click [HERE](#).



Plastic Free Lunch Day

The biannual [Plastic Free Lunch Day](#) (PFLD) is coming up on **Nov. 18 - 22**. PFLD is presented by Cafeteria Culture and the Urban School Food Alliance and is an easy way for schools to ease into reducing disposable packaging and foodware. Schools can participate for one day, a couple days, or the whole week.

PFLD programming can include:

- **Screening the film [Microplastic Madness](#)**, the award-winning (and very engaging) student-led film in your school or classroom for free Sept. 9 - Nov. 30.
- **Easy Action Options**
 - Waste audits
 - Plastic foodware reduction: bulk condiment dispensers, individual utensil dispensers, serving finger-foods. There is an action for everyone!
 - [EasyStart K-12 packet](#)
 - [Zero waste](#) lunches from home
- **Watching [School Food Directors Talk Cafeteria Plastic Reduction](#) webinar** (password:1=QV#86O) Dr. Katie Wilson, USFA Executive Director, & Johannes van der Pool, Child Nutrition Services Director, (Fremont, California) talk cafeteria plastics!



Join the movement! Over 2,000 schools participated nationwide during the Spring PFLD!

Grants and other opportunities

[Plastic Free Restaurants](#) Plastic Free Restaurants is dedicated to eliminating single-use petroleum-based products in everyday foodware. Plastic products are not only harmful to the environment but also human health. Their subsidy program is available to schools, non-profits, restaurants, and other for-profit entities to purchase safe reusable foodware products. Apply for a subsidy [HERE](#).

[Whole Kids Foundation Salad Bar Grant](#) Any district or independent school participating in the National School Lunch Program can apply. The grant program donates salad bars to U.S. schools to give kids daily access to fresh fruits and vegetables. **Applications are**

accepted on a rolling basis.

Youth Outdoor Equity Leadership Fund The Children & Nature Network invites young leaders in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada between the ages of 16 and 30 to request up to \$500 to grow professionally as a leader in the movement or to implement projects that create change in equitable access to nature, community health, well being, and justice. **Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.**

Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom Book/Project Grant Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom is offering two grants for Illinois teachers.

- **Teacher Project Grants** provide up to \$300 to PreK-12th grade teachers for projects that promote agricultural literacy in the classroom. **Deadline: Oct. 18.**
- **Teacher Book Grants** provide up to \$250 in books from a pre-selected list of titles to help teachers integrate agriculture into their curricula. **Deadline: Oct. 18.**

Illinois Green School Project Applications are now open for schools to form a green team, identify their school's sustainability needs and goals, and reduce their school's impact by designing and implementing a personalized no- to low-cost sustainability project. **Deadline to apply is Nov. 11.**

Illinois Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant Earn up to \$2000 for the development of wildlife habitat at your school! Projects must emphasize student/youth involvement with planning, development and maintenance and increase the educational and wildlife habitat values of the site. **Applications due Nov. 30.**

Events

Farm to Fork Feast

Oct. 12, McDonald Farm, Naperville, IL

Join Illinois Stewardship Alliance for an evening of local food, fellowship and celebration of farmers, eaters, and food system leaders working together for 50 years.

The Conservation Foundation: Curricular Connections to the Outdoors

Oct. 19, 301 N. Washington St., Naperville, IL

Take part in an exciting professional development event hosted by the DuPage Children's Museum, The Conservation Foundation, and The Field Museum, designed for K-8 educators. You'll discover how to integrate local nature into your curriculum both indoors and outdoors, gaining practical tools to engage students in outdoor learning experiences!

PPC Webinar - Plastic-Free President: The Future of U.S. Policy on Plastics

Oct. 23, 4 - 5 pm cst

Join the Plastic Pollution Coalition for a discussion with key allies and policy experts about recommendations and priorities for the next U.S. Administration, to protect people and the planet.

SCARCE: Repair Fair

Oct. 26, 9 am - 12 pm, 800 S. Rohlwing, Addison, IL 60101

Come out for SCARCE's 4th Repair Fair! Experts will be on-site to perform simple repairs on household items. Stop by this free event to see how a simple and affordable repair can make treasured items feel like new.

Reuse-a-Palooza - Halloween Edition!

Oct. 27, 11 am - 3 pm, 1400 W. 46th St, Chicago, IL

This semiannual event provides opportunities to repair clothing and household items, safely dispose tricky-to-recycle items, and donate bicycles, gently used books, and more, all the while bringing attention to strategies to reduce waste and improve environmental conditions.

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