BLACK GOLD

I have always wondered what happens to the peels of a banana after a snack, or where the vegetable scraps from the kitchen lead to. They normally end up in trash bags, picked up by the garbage collectors, and eventually end up in a landfill. In the United States alone, around 108 billion pounds/161 billion dollars worth of food is wasted each year. This estimates around 40 percent of our produce to be wasted.

When scraps and produce are left out in landfills, they rot and release toxic biogas, known as methane. It is twenty-eight to thirty-six times more toxic than carbon dioxide and traps faster than carbon dioxide. These factors bring global warming and the future could be worse if these issues continue.

Recycling plastic and glass has been popular these days, though recycling wasted food is not taken seriously by our community despite it being the cheapest process that any common person can do. I got inspired by some of the youtube videos on composting and started my composting project. This is a process where natural matter becomes fertile soil, which can eventually be used for growing plants. I chose to do a large 40-gallon hot compost pile, which involved mixing various types of natural brown and green waste in a 4:1 ratio to build

a pile, then water, toss, measure its temperature every week, and watch it for a period of 8-10 weeks turning into what gardeners call “BLACK GOLD”.

I started my project by collecting kitchen scraps from our kitchen. I reminded my family to put the banana and mango peels in a box. I also requested a few neighbors in the community to collect their food scraps and garden wastes. The most interesting part is my repeated bike trips to local Starbucks and Coffee Beans to collect the coffee grounds. They welcomed me with a big smile, and they went above and beyond to spread the word to all their employees in different shifts and save coffee grounds every week. The local pizzeria, Subway, and breakfast places extended their hands when I approached them for help and provided me with their vegetable scraps and eggshells. Our gardener was generous enough to dump all the green and brown wastes that he collected from every house in our backyard. I built my

compost with the help of my family and a friend. To make my compost more fertile, I dug through the soil every weekend to find some earthworms and added them to the compost. With the overwhelming support I received from local stores, I started thinking about how this can be a project for each student in my class, in my school, and many other schools.

At the moment, my compost is in its 5th week of decomposing, really cooking well, and I anticipate the arrival of fresh, nutritious soil very soon. My goal is to donate this fertile black soil to my community and the city's community garden and take my goal to the next step by motivating my classmates to do the same in their community. I strongly believe that like me, many other kids here will be interested in saving the environment and serving the community. I am planning to take this project to my school principal, and get their support to form a team in my school and conduct sessions to tell kids what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how to do it.

As we progress with this project as a big team and demonstrate the outcome to our community, I am also planning to talk to the city officials to conduct a BLACK GOLD DRIVE for the

residents of the city to participate in this project. The soil in our valley is not fertile, so 3 to 4 feet of bad soil is dug and filled with fertile soil that is usually purchased from commercial stores. I am optimistic that this project will benefit our community in many ways, build a healthy environment, create our own fertile soil allowing us to grow more plants and trees, save money, and our planet!

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