

# Trash...recycle...compost

By Ginny Gregory

I stood quietly pondering the public trash cans when I visited Prince Edward Island this summer. I know what the words mean, but the word compost is not one found in the mainstream so much in the USA, much less found on a public trash can. My host/friend had the same system in all rooms of her house. All paper she put in the wood stove in the kitchen. The compost, trash and recycling were in small containers upstairs and down. I consider myself fairly intelligent, but I was slow to catch on, in that all plastic and glass was recyclable ... all. I am a creature of habit, but am teachable.

I lived in Prince Edward Island 30 years ago. I built a small house with the help of my neighbors and worked the land with a German import from Toronto. This carefully thought out disposal system did not exist then. But over time I am sure the visionary folks of the island began to realize that their Island is a precious space. Like in all rural areas in the world, we have used our land as private "dumps" for years. Thirty five years ago my sister and brother-in-law looked for two years to find land in Orange County that did not have old washing machines and two million tin cans stashed away in a gully. The 35 acres they finally found was land locked and it took them two more



People on Prince Edward Island are conscientious about the small place in which they live, consuming as little as possible and reusing whatever they can.

years to get a right of way. So we are all slow to catch on to the fact that this land of ours is precious.

My PEI friend Eliza Jane said in a mildly dismayed manner, "Well, Ginny we are an island. There is only so much space." Indeed! I noticed that she lived as we had 30 years ago. There was very little packaged anything in the house. NO paper towels, foil was carefully washed and reused. No plastic wrap. Spots were hand washed out of clothes and aired out to be worn again.

The dryer was rarely used as there was a line outside and drying racks in the basement.

On an 8' by 12' deck there were tomatoes, parsley, kale, a small compost bin that was turned and worked daily, 5 beautiful flowering containers and a handmade water feature that was unplugged each night (as was every thing in the house). This lifestyle was second nature. Banana peels were cut up well, tea bags opened etc. as their compost season is only four months long and Eliza wanted to make sure it all composted before the snow moved in. The city provides two containers that are picked up weekly—all weeds and plants in one bin, trash in the other. Recycling is picked up monthly. This is a total island service which is paid for through their taxes. Ah! Evidence of taxes at work!

Eliza Jane's house is very compact and there are cubbies hidden throughout. Over the years they have raised four children (one they grew and three they adopted), renovated an old farm house on 70 acres of land, and built a new house on land ... raised chickens, pigs and sheep for their own meat. Grew and froze veggies during their very short growing season and used wood heat. As time went on they bought a house to live in and a duplex house to rent out in the central spot of the island, Charlottown. They renovated both dwellings and now have sold it all and pared down to the unique little house they now call home.

In her spare time Eliza Jane bikes, kayaks and roller blades in the warm months. She snow shoes and ice skates in the colder months. She has been an independent tour guide for the island and a conflict intervention facilitator. Eliza taught ESL in the

school system for years, but now tutors children who need special attention either due to language or learning difficulties from her home. Her husband Rich works for the Confederation Center in theater. He became a union theater person after a career in teaching. His season is four months long. He managed the local horse racing track and owned and raced his own horse for a while. Now he travels and sails with friends throughout the world when theater season ends on the island. They are both writers. Eliza Jane has written a book and a play that got produced by her husband Rich in the convention center and played throughout Canada. Rich is currently writing for a Canadian magazine. There is no fluff in their lives, but they are enjoying a wealthy quality of life.

They are not consumers. They are re-users, recyclers, sharers. Their car sits basically idle. It is used by a neighbor once a week to pick up movies for a local movie theater and when friends/family comes to visit and explore their precious island. Once a week they go to get groceries. They have situated themselves so that their social and physical network surrounds them. They live simply so others can simply live. It's not just a bumper sticker to them ... it is their way of life.

My Prince Edward Island years were few, but I think they formed my personal direction and values for life. I haven't exactly misplaced those values, but I am having to squint to see them. I find myself really analyzing my "now" and future choices. Being a person of wretched excess in the garden ... well, has that become my everyday me?

I will ponder this as I enjoy my hummers and butterflies dart, swoop and glide through my flowers. It is raining here after a dry spell. I hear the squeaking of the hummers as they buzz by the screened porch. The smell of rain makes me feel soaked to the bones.

I feel so much gratitude for the gracious plenty in my life. Soak in those garden moments. Ponder your place in the world. May we all live simply so others can simply live?

*Ginny Gregory is the owner and creative energy behind "Beyond The Pail...Creating Gardens and Beyond." Check [www.beyondthepail.net](http://www.beyondthepail.net)*



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