**Earth Care Farm**
**Working in Harmony with Nature**
by Frank Chrupcala
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For 35 years, Earth Care Farm has worked in harmony with nature to produce nutrient-rich compost. Gardeners across the state have come to know Earth Care’s products and what their compost can do for their soil and plants.
“Our compost stands alone in the market,” farm manager John Barth said. “Its diversity is what plants thrive on and it’s what separates our product from others.”

Composting is a biological recycling process. The transformation of raw materials into finished, healthy compost is performed by numerous beneficial bacteria, fungi and microscopic creatures with assistance from the elemental forces of air, heat and water.

Nobody does it better than Earth Care Farm, Rhode Island’s oldest farm composter. It was founded in 1979 by Michael Merner, who retired last month. His farm is now in good hands with Barth and Sam Fox, both South Kingstown natives. The small staff at Earth Care is committed to carrying on a rich tradition of nutrient-rich compost.

“Mike started this farm with a pitchfork and built it up one tractor at a time,” Barth said.

“He is the life force behind the are of this operation,” Fox added. “He’s passionate about what we’re doing.

Earth Care Farm’s compost provides a gentle, long-lasting source of soil fertility, bringing beneficial microorganisms and other helpful substances to the soil and improving its physical, biological and chemical nature in the process.

The farm’s compost is made from the cleanest, most nutrient-rich organic materials available in the bio-region including food scraps, fish scraps, shellfish, seaweed and animal manure, notable exotic manures from Roger Williams Park Zoo. Dry materials like sawdust, wood shavings, plant trimmings and straw are also important ingredients in Earth Care’s compost. The bulk of the dry material is comprised of bags of leaves collected by local municipalities.

All ingredients are blended, mixed and turned in an aerobically managed system. The massive piles of raw materials eventually become massive piles of the finest compost in the region. The process takes approximately 14 months from start to finish, not counting the collection period.

Not all compost is created equally and few are given the care that Earth Care Farm’s receives. Most other compost products on the market are made from only dry materials like grass, leaves and brush, ingredients which are low in nutrients and may contain pesticide residues or inorganic trash. Gardeners simply will not see impressive results with these lower quality products. The best way to increase nutrient content in a garden is to add microorganism-rich compost – Earth Care Farm’s specialty.

Proof can be found on the farm’s land in Charlestown – The results can delight visitors’ senses. A clean, earthy smell emanates and fruitful plants and colossal mounds of compost are abundant on the 30-acre farm. Fox proudly and confidently claims Earth Care is home to “the best soil in Rhode Island.”

“Successful gardening is a labor of love,” Barth said. “We have some distributors and bulk buyers, but we mostly sell to homeowners. Gardeners know our material works for their applications. They know it’s worth the trip.”

In addition to helping gardens grow, Earth Care Farm has truly made this small piece of the planet a better place. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of tons of reusable materials have been redirected from the landfill to the farm, becoming nutrient-rich compost rather than waste.

“It’s important to us that we make it easier for this community to be ecologically responsible,” Barth said.

Earth Care Farm is located at 89 County Drive in Charlestown. In addition to high-quality compost, Earth Care Farm also offers rhubarb, pick-you-own strawberries and custom-raised free-range beef and pork. For more information, visit EarthCareFarm.com, find the farm on Facebook or call 401-364-9930.