



Restaurant owner Suda Veerasethakul, top, and her daughter, Toa Green, manage to recycle most of the waste from their business, including organic waste, which is composted in Green's garden.



## Thai café is perfect example for how to achieve zero waste

Tucked away off South Broadway amid a variety of restaurants including Sonic and Jalapeños is a small, thriving business that could be a role model for dedication to the environment. The Thai Orchid Café, which has been in business three years and an official WasteBuster business for two, is as close to the city's "Zero Waste" goal as any business or residence could be.

Serving the cuisine of Thailand for lunch and dinner 6 days a week, at the end of the day, only a five-gallon bucket of table scraps is their garbage. "So much waste goes out of businesses," says Toa Green, who manages the restaurant owned by her parents. "If we can recycle so much in our small space, there's no excuse for larger companies not implementing a recycling program. We need to get more people involved."

Within the tight quarters of the cooking and storage area is one fairly large bin where paper, boxboard, e.g. egg cartons, steel food cans and plastics are collected. And, scattered around the areas are five-

gallon buckets that soy sauce comes in where aluminum, glass, and organic food waste are kept until transferred to the restaurant's three Rosies or taken to Green's house for composting.

Prior to joining the WasteBuster program, Green took the recyclables home. In this cluster of various types of businesses, this restaurant is only one of two WasteBuster businesses.

Green says training their seven employees to recycle was not a problem. "Recycling is just second nature here," she says. "We train our employees to ask first if they don't know; in other words they have to get permission to put something in the garbage."

Organic waste, which includes fruit and vegetable waste, plus egg shells, coffee grounds and tea bags, is a huge part of any restaurant's waste. At the Thai Orchid Café the organic waste goes first to the compost pile at Green's house, which she calls a "worm hotel," then is put on her garden to naturally nourish

the vegetables, which then come back to be served at the restaurant. "It's a wonderful cycle of life that we enjoy," Green says.

Suda Veerasethakul, the restaurant owner and Green's mother, is a former employee of the state's Department of Waste Management, and says she knows about landfills. "It takes extra time and effort to have these containers around our kitchen, but that does not stop us from running our business efficiently, and our customers appreciate that we recycle," Veerasethakul says.

By recycling and composting, Green says they have cut their trash bill by 30 percent. They have the smallest dumpster they can rent and it is dumped only every other week and is far from full then. Green says a dumpster is required by their space-rental contract or they wouldn't have it. But, Veerasethakul says they don't re-use and recycle for monetary gains, "it's the right thing to do for the Earth; it's hard to quantify."