They call themselves the ‘compost-converts’ and go by the alias ‘daily dumpers.’ Pouring over terracotta pots, this new odd breed of eco-saviours begin their mornings with a strange ritual. Emptying their kitchen to the last grain, they have been observed to feed their “black gold” clay pots with copious amounts of veggies and fruits, to bring about a “good yield”. The leftover pizza crumbs, that rotting Subway sandwich, banana peels, all make excellent ingredients for their flourishing gold mine.

Wasteful Indulgence
Rummaging through their daily waste, many like Gurgaon’s Dr Jaya Deshpande are a part of the Daily Dump family, united in the mission to get one and all down and dirty. “I was raising two kids who ran around the house creating a mess everywhere they went. There was so much rubbish to dispose on a daily basis that I knew there had to be a better way than merely segregating my household waste for the garbage truck. I was browsing the internet to figure out a way to make this waste useful, when I stumbled upon Poonam’s website,” says the 33-year-old homeopathy doctor. Finding meaning in junk and debris, Jaya, like thousands others across the country, embraced the art of home composting.

“Initially I was a bit sceptical. Hygiene was my prime concern. People said it would stink, there would be flies all around. I was surrounded by all sorts of hogwash that only a blurred understanding of home composting brings,” she says. At the onset, unsure of handling a single three-tier composting urn, Jaya is now a Daily Dump Clone, with over 25 pots stacked up in her backyard. Like other home composting enthusiasts,
Jays recalls the thrill of her first produce. “It’s a fairly simple and do-
able exercise. Luckily I have ample space in my backyard, which is
ideal for home composting. I remember when I saw my first harvest
— it was rich, black manure, superior in quality from what you get
elsewhere; and it was produced in my own house. It was like all my
efforts had finally paid off,” she fondly recollects.

Uning Green Points
The brainchild of Bangalore-based industrial designer Poonam
Kasturi, who is also the co-founder of Srishthi School of Art, Design
and Technology, Daily Dump was initiated in April 2006. Searching
for a tangible solution to ease the overflowing landfill sites, Poonam
kicked off her non-profit venture with the aid of two students. “Two
years of intermittent research went before we struck upon this idea.
We visited many composting sites in Bangalore, conducted focus
group discussions, read all the literature available, before arriving at
an eco-friendly approach to garbage management at home.”

For this 46-year-old NID graduate, the solution lay in a simple pot.
“It wasn’t really a ‘eureka’ moment. We all knew the answer lay in
composting. The trouble was to find a sustainable way to carry it
out within urban housing societies,” she feels. Finding her answer
in three-tier clay pots, Poonam’s design grounding helped her find
a solution that was functional as well as aesthetic. The process was
simple — the idea was to use decorative terracotta pots stacked
on top of each other, with the kitchen and other biodegradable
household waste resigned to rot inside, only to be converted, over a
period of 2 months, into nutritious manure for the earth.

“Composting is nature’s way of recycling. It’s a dynamic process,
and there is no way to fail with composting. I wanted ordinary
Indians to feel empowered to make a difference to the waste
surrounding them. With 50-70 per cent of our household waste
being organic, it would make a huge difference by keeping this
waste off the streets,” exclaims Poonam.

Presently, with an army of 5,000 green citizens endorsing her cause,
Poonam proudly points out, “Today, our customers keep 3,230 kgs of
organic waste out of landfills.” Devising a simple product with which
anyone can convert kitchen waste into nutrients at home, Poonam’s
innovative solution won her the Green Product of the Year by Anchor
Better Interior Excellence Awards 2007 and has been adopted in 58
countries worldwide.

Green Potheads
Available in various shapes and sizes, Daily Dump’s biodegradable
composting pots and vessels come with interesting monikers like
gamla, kambha, patta kambha and mota lota, to suit your needs and
size requirements. Sourced from potter families in Palamnur village,
near Tirupati, these chrysanthemum-encased composting mud pots are placed vertically over each other to facilitate aerobic
decomposition, wherein the waste is broken down by microbes.
Charged with a vision to see a composter pre-fitted in every flat sold in the country, Poonam Kasturi is presently busy adding final touches to her gen-next hassle-free, mechanised composter.

Refusing to reap the benefits of her brainwave, Poonam believes in a utilitarian approach. "We, humans have put a man on the moon. This is nothing. It was such a simple idea, I wondered why others had't thought of it all this while. " With 'dumping' clones like Jaya forming a sizeable floating population of the organisation, Daily Dump works on an open-source business plan, lending its design to anyone interested in green living. So you can replicate, adapt, build on, sell and use Poonam's idea to boost its popularity. "Our designs are protected by a creative commons license and our cloning approach allows us to support every person who is brave enough to undertake home composting," says Poonam, who is currently working towards publishing an illustrated children's book on her favourite subject.

Trashy Issues
And though this cost-effective, do-it-yourself kitchen-waste composter is no rocket science, the tedious process of segregating waste, adding dry leaves, shifting containers, cleaning pots, stirring compost at regular intervals and sprinkling a dash of neem powder to keep maggots at bay, is a deterrent for the average lazy burn of an Indian. "There are always many drop-outs. 500 out of 5,000 will never stay till the maturation of manure," says Poonam.

Buzzing flies, slithering maggots and a putrefying smell are all aftershocks visiting the uncared-for home composters. "Consumers who lack the time or desire to care for their composting pot can opt for a weekly, fortnightly or monthly service plan, essentially allowing you to just dump and let nature and the Daily Dump criss team do the rest. But frankly, it requires one month of wrapping your head around the composting pots and once you've figured it workings, it's just about making a few mental adjustments. It barely takes five minutes," feels Goa-based Clone, Karan Morral.

Charged with a vision to see a composter pre-fitted in every flat sold in the country, Poonam is presently busy adding final touches to her gen-next hassle-free, mechanised composter. "It'll leave less to manual labour and do things on its own. We'll be unveiling it around the end of August, and I've already received 50 orders for it." Until then, we'll say you keep some dry leaves handy. And happy dumping! &-

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**Throwaway Figures**

The 300 Indian cities with a population of more than 100,000 generate between 52,000 tonnes and 85,000 tonnes of garbage every day. Less than half of this is treated before disposal. And although over 35 per cent of waste in urban India can be composted, only 5 per cent actually ends up in the compost pits.

Bangalore produces over 2,000 tonnes of garbage every day while the government waste facility can only handle 500 tonnes.

60 per cent of our household waste is organic in nature and can be given back to nature.

Indian weather is ideal for composting in most parts of the country and it is sustainable. For more info on Daily Dump, visit dailydump.org