

Tips for Green Leaders

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Frederick County



Composting: Do the Rot Thing



Food scraps and yard trimmings can be diverted from landfills through composting.

Why Compost?

Composting food and yard scraps is a great way to make inexpensive, high quality soil amendment for lawn and garden. It also reduces the volume of the garbage stream entering our municipal waste facilities.

In 2009, U.S. residents, institutions, and businesses produced more than 243 million tons of garbage. That amounts to about 4.4 pounds per person per day (up from 2.7 pounds per person per day in 1960)! Of this, 13.7 percent was yard trimmings and 14.1 percent was food scraps. That's almost 25 percent of landfill mass that could be composted.

Adding compost to soil improves its structure, texture, and aeration. Plants grown in compost are stronger and more resistant to disease and insects and, therefore, require less insecticide. Healthy soil absorbs and filters runoff, protecting streams from erosion and pollution.

Composting Methods

If possible, locate the compost pile in a partially shaded spot. Choose a site that is convenient – has easy access from the kitchen, good drainage, and available water. When building a pile, start with a brown layer (see chart on next page). Always bury food scraps in the pile or top them with another compostable material.



Pre-made bins, like this one available through the Office of Recycling, are easy to set up.

The simplest method of composting is to pile the materials on top of each other directly on the ground. But a bin can help contain the compost and keep out critters. The ideal size for a compost bin is 1 cubic yard (3 x 3 x 3 feet). Wood bins can be made from four used shipping pallets that are tied together with wire. A fifth pallet can be used as a floor to provide better air circulation to the pile. A wire bin can easily be made with a circular loop of fencing or chicken wire. In order to move or turn the pile, simply pick up the bin and allow the compost to fall through the open bottom. Place the bin next to its last location and fork the top of the pile into the bottom of the new location.

There are also several types of composting bins and tumblers commercially available.

Resources:

- Frederick County Government Office of Recycling offers workshops and \$20 composting bins
301.600.2960
www.co.frederick.md.us/Recycling/
- Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/wastes/conserve/rrr/composting/
- Composting instructional video
tinyurl.com/yjm9ecc
- City of Toronto's composting site
www.toronto.ca/compost/
- Sites for information on bintypes
www.composting101.com/
tinyurl.com/6tof3fk,
tinyurl.com/rak8q5

Materials to Compost

Ok to Compost

- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Egg shells
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags
- Leaves, grass, and yard clippings
- Lint
- Barnyard manure
- Shredded paper, cardboard, or tissues
- Aquarium water, algae, and plants

Do not Compost

- Meat or dairy products
- Anything containing oil or grease
- Fish scraps
- Diseased plants
- Bones
- Sawdust from plywood, treated, or painted wood
- Clippings recently treated with pesticides
- Insect-infested plants
- Pet waste (can compost separately)

Two Types of Compostable Materials

Browns (Carbon)

- Leaves and dried yard clippings
- Straw
- Woody Materials

Greens (Nitrogen)

- Grass and fresh yard clippings
- Food Scraps
- Barnyard manure



Add an equal amount of browns and green to your compost pile.

An equal amount of greens and browns should keep a compost pile in balance. Too many greens will produce a smelly, soggy mess, while too many browns will take a long time to decompose.

Compost piles should be as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Piles may need to be sprinkled with water occasionally during the summer. They may need to be covered with a tarp if there are extended periods of wet weather.

For quicker composting, aerate the pile every two to three weeks by turning with a pitchfork or poking holes in the pile with a broom handle.

Compost is ready to use when the raw materials are no longer visible. Finished compost is dark brown and has an earthy smell. The bottom of the pile may be ready before the top.

Micro- and Macroorganisms

Tiny organisms inside of your compost pile are the ones actually turning waste into rich soil. Macroorganisms include earthworms, sow bugs, and other insects. Microorganisms include bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. These elements will come to your pile naturally as long as the pile is not located on concrete or a paved surface. Place your bin on the ground so organisms can colonize the compost pile.

Did you know...

More than 67% of the municipal solid waste produced in the U.S. (including paper) is compostable.



"Tips for Green Leaders in Frederick County" is a publication of the Frederick County Office of Sustainability and Environmental Resources, Office of the County Executive. For more information on this topic and about our programs, visit www.frederickcountymd/sustainability, email us at sustainability@frederickcountymd.gov, or call at 301.600.1416. Sustainable Frederick County is on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.