



COMPOST OPTIONS

Bins. Optimal size is 3'x3'x3' (27 cu. ft.) and no larger than 5'x5'x5' to maintain aerobic activity. Use chicken wire, wooden pallets, cinder block, or plastic to contain the pile. Or if space allows, you may want to create an informal heap. Position your bin away from your house on level ground in the shade or in the sun.

Vermicomposting. An indoor composting method that uses redworms (*Eisenia foetida*) to transform kitchen scraps and shredded newspaper into compost.

Sheet composting. Create a garden bed by layering newspaper (full sheets), leaves, grass clippings and compost into the shape you desire. Water well. This method is typically done in the fall for spring planting.

Trench composting. Dig a trench at least 12" deep to bury your kitchen scraps. Cover them with soil.

HOW TO USE COMPOST

- ✓ Spread finished compost as mulch or top dressing for plants.
- ✓ Turn it into your soil to improve the soil structure.
- ✓ Create compost tea for ornamental and potted plants.

For additional instructions, please see Publication #35, referenced on the back panel, *For More Information*.

Compost Demonstration Sites and Bins

Charles E. Miller Branch Library Garden
Robinson Nature Center

Compost Information and Bins

Alpha Ridge Landfill
East Columbia Library
Glenwood Branch Library

Community Events

GreenFest, Native Plant Sale, Fall Festival

Check dates and times available at

<http://extension.umd.edu/mg/locations/composting>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Home & Garden Information Center

<http://extension.umd.edu/hgic>

Check out the Library for Publication #35
"Backyard Composting"

Howard County

Bureau of Environmental Services

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Public-Works/Bureau-Of-Environmental-Services/Recycling/Composting>

University of Maryland Extension Howard County Master Gardeners

<https://extension.umd.edu/mg/locations/howard-county-master-gardeners>

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BACKYARD COMPOSTING



Compost is a dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling material produced by the natural decomposition of leaves, kitchen scraps, and other organic materials. Useful to amend garden soil.

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COMPOSTING

A MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM



BENEFITS OF COMPOST

- **Reduces** waste stream. Yard and food waste that can be composted make up 25% or more of landfills.
- **Improves** soil structure. Compost helps break up clay and attracts earthworms that aerate your soil.
- **Retains** moisture. Slows run-off from rain by holding three times its weight in water. If you incorporate compost in the soil you'll water less often.
- **Reduces** the need for fertilizer. Compost provides nutrients for your plants, trees, lawns and shrubs.
- **Contributes** to healthier landscapes and gardens.

MEET THE DECOMPOSERS

Bacteria, fungi, and other microbes are the key players in composting. These organisms "feed" on organic matter and use the carbon and nitrogen it contains to grow and reproduce. They are assisted by many larger organisms such as earthworms, slugs, snails, millipedes, sow bugs, springtails, ants and various insect larvae that feed on plant and animal matter in soil. These same organisms are responsible for the decay of forest floor litter.

Did you know...even though many organic materials are initially acidic (low pH), the compost process tends to neutralize the pH of the finished product resulting in a pH of around 7.0, or neutral pH.



COMPOSTING BASICS

Here's What Goes In:

1. Nitrogen (*greens*)
2. Carbon (*browns*)
3. Water
4. Oxygen

Examples of Nitrogen and Carbon Sources

"Greens"

Yard trimmings
Kitchen scraps
(*fruits & vegetables*)
Coffee grounds, filters
Tea bags
Pet hair
Manure (*from herbivores such as cows, horses, rabbits*)

"Browns"

Dried leaves
Newspaper
(*shredded*)
Straw
Peanut shells
Cotton fabric
Pine needles
Garden debris
(*dried*)

Things to AVOID in your compost

Fats and oils	Synthetic fabric
Dairy products	Plastic
Dog and cat manure	Wood ash
Meat products and bones	

When in doubt, leave it out.



HOW-TO TIPS

- Add equal amounts (by weight) of browns and greens.
- Bury food scraps in pile.
- Turn (stir) your pile to add oxygen.
- Keep pile moist (wet as wrung out sponge).
- If material is not decomposing: add water, add greens or turn the pile to add oxygen.
- If there is an ammonia odor: add browns such as leaves, straw or shredded paper.
- Compost is finished when you can no longer recognize the materials you put in the pile.
- Test for finished compost: put a handful in a sealed plastic bag and look for condensation. If none appears, your compost is done!

Cold (passive) Compost

This method may take from six months to two years for material to break down. Little effort is required. Add materials as you have them and let them rot.

Hot (active) Compost

Add the proper mixture of browns and greens to fill your bin and moisten the pile. Turn it frequently but do not add more raw materials unless the process is not working properly. Temperature should reach 110-140+ degrees. The pile will cool as decomposition nears completion. Compost is ready to use in about two months.