

Composting Resources for the Public

Benefits of Composting

- Composting saves space in landfills by reducing the amount of food, yard trim, and other organic materials that must be disposed.
- Composting reduces greenhouse gas emissions by diverting organic materials from landfills, where they would break down anaerobically and generate methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.
- Composting materials on-site or within the community can reduce the energy needed to transport materials longer distances for disposal. About 42% of all Maryland waste disposed each year is hauled out of State for disposal.
- Composting creates a valuable product from resources that otherwise would be wasted. Compost improves soil quality by improving soil structure, adding nutrients that are slowly released over time, improving pH, and increasing water retention. It can also help control erosion.
- Composting creates jobs. A 2013 Report by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance states that in Maryland, composting sustains twice as many jobs as landfilling on a per-ton basis.¹

U.S. Composting Council's fact sheet, [Compost and Its Benefits](#), provides more detail on the benefits of using compost.

Every year, organic materials are recycled at commercial and government composting facilities in Maryland. In addition to these centralized facilities, individuals play a significant role in composting; individuals support composting as providers of feedstocks, users of compost, and backyard composters. The following are actions any Marylander can take to get involved in composting, along with some resources to assist with each.

Compost at Home

Below is a small selection of the many resources on home composting that are available online. In addition to these, some counties as well as local Master Gardener programs offer information, demonstrations, and classes on home composting. Some counties also sell or give away composting bins to residents on a seasonal basis. [Contact your county recycling office](#) or visit your county's website for more information.

¹ Platt, Brenda, Bobby Bell, and Cameron Harsh, *Pay Dirt: Composting in Maryland to Reduce Waste, Create Jobs, and Protect the Bay*, p. 8 (2013) <http://www.ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ILSR-Pay-Dirt-Report-05-11-13.pdf>
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[CalRecycle, Building your Own Composting Bin: Designs for Your Community.](#) This document provides detailed instructions on building over a dozen different types of composting bins that can be used for backyard composting. If you prefer to purchase a composting bin, they can be found at most garden supply retailers.

[U.S. EPA, Backyard Composting: It's Only Natural.](#) This brief EPA fact sheet lists the basics of composting, its benefits, and how to get started.

[Seattle's Composting at Home Guide.](#) This 12-page guide is aimed at residents starting backyard compost piles for food scraps and yard trim and includes compost "recipes" and step-by-step instructions.

[CalRecycle, Compost Pile Microbes.](#) Curious about how organic materials are broken down during composting? This website discusses the various organisms that can be found in a backyard compost pile and explains their roles in the composting process.

[Cornell Waste Management Institute, Composting at Home – The Green and Brown Alternative.](#) This illustrated guide discusses methods for separating and collecting feedstocks in the yard or kitchen, selecting a site and bin for composting, and creating an optimal mix by layering feedstocks.

[University of Maryland Extension, Home and Garden Center Compost Page.](#) This page includes tips, videos, and troubleshooting information for home composters.

[Cornell Waste Management Institute, Preventing Animal Nuisances in Small Scale Composting.](#) This fact sheet provides tips on deterring animals, particularly rodents, that may be attracted to your composting pile.

[U.S. Composting Council Backyard Composting Links.](#) This site lists resources and publications from many states related to home composting.

Videos – The following are brief videos on backyard composting that are available online for free.

- [Cornell Waste Management Institute, Composting, Truth or Consequences](#)
- [Baltimore County, Composting Yard Materials at Home.](#) (Note: Baltimore County prohibits backyard composting of food scraps, so the video discusses composting of yard trim along with alternative methods for managing food scraps.)
- [Montgomery County, Composting - Make it happen: A guide to backyard composting.](#)
- [Connecticut DEEP: Home Composting: Turn Your Spoils Into Soil](#)

NOTE ABOUT REGULATION: Individual backyard composting of materials generated at a residence is generally not regulated by MDE. However, counties or municipalities in Maryland may have their own requirements related to backyard composting. If you are unsure of the requirements, be sure to contact your county recycling office before you begin composting (directory located [here](#)).

Use Compost in Your Garden

Compost Directories. The following directories can be used to locate sources of compost in Maryland. In addition, most gardening and home improvement stores sell bagged compost.

- [Biocycle Find-a-Composter](#)
- [Mid-Atlantic Composting Directory](#)
- [U.S. Composting Council, Compost Locator](#) (lists U.S. Composting Council members only)
- [Maryland State Chemist list of registered soil conditioners](#)

[Calculator Pro Compost Calculator](#). This calculator allows a consumer to determine how much compost to purchase given the dimensions of the space to be landscaped. (Leave the bulk density blank if you do not know it).

[U.S. Composting Council, Field Guide to Compost Use](#). This extensive guide details various uses for compost and describes the characteristics of compost best suited for each. It also contains steps for each use and general information about how to apply compost. Shorter instructions for compost use on trees and shrubs, vegetable and flower gardens, and lawns are available [here](#).

[Washington Department of Ecology, Buying and Using Compost](#). This fact sheet explains the characteristics of good compost and what to look for when purchasing compost.

[New York City Compost Project Tip Sheet: How to Use Compost](#). This fact sheet lists 8 uses of compost and provides the suggested quantity of compost and steps for each use.

Promote Composting and Compost Use

Aside from creating and using compost, Marylanders can support composting in the State in the following ways:

- Educate others on the benefits and uses of compost.
- Start a collection and/or composting program for food scraps and other organics at work, school, or a community organization.
- Participate in residential yard trim or food scrap collection programs offered by your local jurisdiction. Some counties and municipalities in Maryland offer curbside collection of yard trim and others offer drop-off locations. If you are unsure of your options for yard trim, consult your county recycling office (contact information located [here](#)).

Additional resources:

- [U.S. Composting Council's International Compost Awareness Week](#), which occurs annually the first week in May, is a good opportunity to promote composting. The website provides ideas and tools for participating. A composting-themed poster contest is held each year and is open to children and adults.
- [Washington State University, Washington State Compost Educator's Guide](#). This guide provides information and resources that can assist community leaders in teaching residents about composting (especially home composting).
- [Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Building Healthy Soils With Compost to Protect Watersheds](#). This report provides case studies and information on how compost use can improve soils and protect water quality.

Food Scraps Source Reduction

While composting is a great way to manage unavoidable food scraps and yard trimmings, avoidable food waste should be prevented wherever possible. This is the environmentally preferable option because it avoids unnecessary irrigation, transportation, fertilizers, and packaging needed to produce and market food that is never consumed.

EPA's Reducing Wasted Food Basics: This EPA site provides information on consumer food waste reduction.

Food: Too Good To Waste: Washington's King County has a website with a number of tools to help households reduce food waste, including videos, shopping tips, storage information, and recipes for making efficient use of ingredients.