



Ten Steps to Home Composting

Why Compost at Home?

- Composting recycles your wastes into a valuable soil amendment that can be used to improve your soil and plantings.
- Disposal of leaves, grass, clipping and other yard waste is a problem for homeowners.
- Yard and food waste make up 30% of the solid waste stream in the U.S.
- Composting is easy, requiring minimal amounts of space and effort.



STEP 1: Selecting a location – You don't need much space for this project, an area as small as 6' by 6' is plenty. If you plan to compost in the winter, choose a sunny spot, otherwise a location with some shade will help to keep the compost moist during the summer months.

STEP 2: Bin design – You can purchase a ready made bin or build one yourself out of basic material(s). The simplest enclosure made of 3' wide, 1" wire mesh, formed into a 3' diameter circle, securing the ends to one another using wooden stakes for support. Another easy enclosure is by reusing four old shipping pallets, secured side to side, making a square box.



STEP 3: Filling the bin – All organic matter, things that were once alive or come from living things is compostable. This includes yard waste such as leaves and grass clippings, kitchen wastes such as fruit and vegetable leavings, coffee grounds, tea leaves, egg shells, etc. DO NOT compost animal products such as meat, bones, fat, grease or pet feces.

STEP 4: Efficient composting – Any combination of organic materials will eventually degrade. For a higher quality product, use a mixture of compatible material. Rule-of-thumb, mix equal parts of BROWN (dry leaves, straw, sawdust, etc.) with GREEN (grass clippings, garden weeds, kitchen scraps) ingredients and shred or cut larger materials for quick composting. Keep kitchen scraps on the inside of the pile to decompose faster.

STEP 5: Let's get started – When combining your BROWN and GREEN ingredients, you should add a shovel or two of soil, this will add microbes into the mix to facilitate the decomposing process. Also, add a small amount of water, you want the compost to be slightly moist, the microbes work better in this environment.

STEP 6: Heat – After a week, check to see if the pile is heating up. This is part of the composting process. The center may get as hot as 150 degrees F. If the center isn't warmer than the outside of the pile, you may need to add more GREEN materials to get the process started.

STEP 7: Turn the pile – Composting works best under oxygen-rich conditions. The pile should be turned at least once a week with a shovel or pitchfork. This will ensure that all the ingredients are thoroughly mixed and will become completely broken down.



STEP 8: Troubleshooting – Odors stem from two possible problems: too much GREEN, or not enough oxygen. In either case, immediately turn the pile to introduce more oxygen. If the problem is too much GREEN, add more BROWN material(s). An overly wet pile may also cause bad odors, if so, use less water.

STEP 9: Compost – After three to ten weeks and many turnings, your compost should be dark, moist, crumbly and ready to use.

STEP 10: Using your compost – Technically, compost is not a fertilizer, it is an excellent soil amendment that improves the structure and quality of your soil. Use your compost in garden beds to increase soil porosity and aeration, around shrubs to keep weeds at a minimum and help retain moisture.

For Additional Recycling Information

Contact the St. Mary's County DPW&T at (301) 863-8400 or visit www.stmarysmd.com