



Calvert County Environmental Commission

Composting Leaves, Yard Debris and Household Wastes

What is composting?

Composting is the natural process of recycling organic matter, such as leaves, yard debris, and food scraps, into a fertilizer that can enrich soil and plants. Anything that grows decomposes eventually; composting simply speeds up the process by providing an ideal environment for bacteria, fungi, and other decomposing organisms to do their work. The resulting decomposed matter, which often ends up looking like fertile garden soil, is called compost. Sometimes called “black gold,” compost is rich in nutrients and can be used for gardening, horticulture, and agriculture.

What types of wastes are suitable for composting?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits and vegetables • Eggshells • Coffee grounds and filters • Tea bags • Nut shells • Shredded newspaper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardboard • Paper • Yard trimmings • Grass clippings • Houseplants • Hay and straw 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaves • Sawdust • Wood chips • Cotton and Wool Rags • Hair and fur • Fireplace ashes
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What types of wastes are not suitable for composting and why?

- Black walnut tree leaves or twigs
 - Releases substances that might be harmful to plants
- Coal or charcoal ash
 - Might contain substances harmful to plants
- Dairy products (e.g., butter, milk, sour cream, yogurt) and eggs
 - Create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies
- Diseased or insect-ridden plants
 - Diseases or insects might survive and be transferred back to other plants
- Fats, grease, lard, or oils
 - Create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies
- Meat or fish bones and scraps
 - Create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies
- Pet wastes (e.g., dog or cat feces, soiled cat litter)
 - Might contain parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens, and viruses harmful to humans
- Yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides
 - Might kill beneficial composting organisms

How is a compost pile prepared?

Follow these steps to prepare compost.

1. Select a location. An area as small as 3' x 3' x 3' will do.
2. Build or buy a compost bin. You can purchase a ready-made compost bin or build one yourself.
3. Get started! Fill your compost bin. All organic matter can be composted. DO NOT compost animal products such as meat, bones, fat, grease or pet feces.

4. Mix the materials. Mix a larger portion of brown materials (dry leaves, straw, sawdust) with a smaller portion of green (grass, weeds, kitchen scraps) ingredients. Shred or cut larger material. Keep kitchen scraps on the inside of the pile.
5. When combining your brown and green ingredients, add a shovel or two of soil and a sprinkle of water to the mix until slightly moist.
6. Feel the heat. After a week, check to see if the pile is heating up. If the center of the pile is not warmer than the outside, add more green items.
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.
8. Troubleshooting. Discover a solution for each challenge you may face. See chart listed on page 23.
9. Ready for action. After three to 10 weeks and many turning cycles, your compost should be dark, moist, crumbly and ready to use.
10. Use your compost! Though compost is not technically a fertilizer, it is an excellent soil amendment that improves the structure and quality of your soil. Use around garden and bed shrubs.

See the USEPA webpage for further information: [Composting At Home | US EPA](#)

NRDC also provides information on composting: <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/composting-101#whatis>

Finally, see the information on composting in the Calvert County Recycling Guide: [Calvert County Recycling Guide](#)