

Transcript for Home Composting Video:

www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/publicworks/recycling/composting/index.html

[Title: Home Composting]

[Music]

Narrator: Nutrient-rich soil is essential for growing healthy plants. You can create your own nutrient-rich soil by adding compost produced from materials in your yard.

Twigs, leaves, grass clippings, and plant trimmings are just some of the materials that can be used to create compost. Composting your yard materials is cheaper and easier than bagging and hauling them. Composting will also help to keep yard materials out of the waste stream.

The process of composting is simple – this is nature’s recycling program at work. Gather your materials and place them in a contained area. Give it a little attention, and let nature go to work. Macroscopic organisms such as worms, slugs, and insects will help break down the compost. Microscopic organisms further decompose the yard material, and provide plant-nourishing nitrites and nitrates.

Baltimore County regulations require that you must have some type of containment around your pile. It can be as little as four sticks in the ground surrounded by a chicken wire fence. An uncontained pile can be considered an “open dump.” Baltimore County code also prohibits placing any type of food materials in compost piles or bins.

Your compost unit should be no smaller than 27 cubic feet – this is a three-foot cube. A pile smaller than this will have trouble creating enough heat to promote microbial action. There are several types of compost units to consider. A holding unit, or “batch,” is used for mostly non-woody yard material. They can be bought, or made from wood and wire. Plastic holding units are portable and inexpensive. Using this type of unit is the least labor-intensive and time-consuming way to compost.

The process is easy – drop yard material into the unit, alternating layers of high-carbon brown material and high-nitrogen green material. Continue filling the bin until it is full, then wait for the yard material to decompose. Be sure to aerate the material by making air passages and turning the pile on occasion. This will promote microbial activity and keep the compost from becoming too wet. Your compost should be as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

With a holding unit, it can take six months to two years to compost yard materials entirely. The right amount of moisture and aeration will speed the composting process. Turning units enhance the decomposition and make aerating the compost easy. If you use mostly green material in this type of unit, and spin it frequently – like daily – compost can be produced in as little as three weeks. Three-bin turning units are great for homeowners who produce large volumes of yard material. The unit consists of three

separate bins made from lumber or cinderblocks and wire. Moving the compost from one bin to the other turns and aerates the mixture. This method produces finished compost in as little as two months.

Nearly anything that was once alive can be composted. This includes grass trimmings, old houseplants, flowers, twigs, leaves, old potting soil, and non-invasive weeds like dandelions. Be sure not to compost poison ivy, poison oak, poison sumac, and giant hogweed. Don't put any type of food or drink, wood ash, charcoal, plastic, metal, glass, or animal feces into your compost pile.

Large branches will take a long time to decompose, so chop them up as small as possible before putting them into your bin or pile. The smaller the pieces you place in your pile, the faster decomposition will occur. You can easily shred your leaves by running a lawnmower over them.

Although food scraps cannot be placed in your compost bin, there are two alternate methods of composting these materials: worm bins and soil incorporation. Neither of these methods are intended to handle meat, fish, bones, dairy, cooking oils, or anything non-organic.

Worm composting, or "vermicomposting," produces high-quality compost and is a great way to compost fruits and vegetables. Use a bin with solid sides, drainage holes, and a tight-fitting lid. Lay down cardboard or other bedding, and place some moist leaves or shredded paper into the bin. Add a pound or more of red wiggler worms, add food scraps, and watch them disappear. As the worm casting compost increases, push the material to one side of the bin and add new bedding on the other side. Put the new food scraps on the side with the new bedding. The worms will move to the side with the new material, and you will be able to harvest the compost.

Soil incorporation involves burying food scraps at least eight inches below the ground. The hole should be filled and covered with dirt. If you use a corner of your garden for this process, you can till the finished material into your garden the following season.

Your compost can be used in your vegetable garden or flower garden, in potted plants, and around trees. It can also be used as a top dressing for your lawn. For more information on composting, the Bureau of Solid Waste Management has a free publication that you can request by calling 410-887-2000, or by e-mailing your request and your mailing address to recycle@baltimorecountymd.gov.

Hope you found this information useful, and thanks for watching.