

# FOOD COMPOSTING

## Made Easy *in* Gaithersburg

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From kitchen to garden, your table scraps can take on a second life as nutrient rich compost. Made up of organic waste, including food items and yard trimmings, compost improves the physical properties of soil and supports plant growth. So before you throw away that banana peel or egg shell, consider reducing your carbon footprint by composting your household food waste.

Why compost? Think of it as nature's way of recycling and managing food waste, with numerous benefits to our planet.

"Composting is the epitome of all-natural sustainability," says Michael Weyand, the City's Watershed Restoration Specialist. "The process enriches soils, encourages natural symbiotic relationships, and indirectly promotes ecosystems diversity."

"Composting reduces the volume of material that is sent to landfills, which emit large amounts of methane, a harmful greenhouse gas," says Phil Wescott, Co-Founder of Key Compost, the City's contracted composting service. "Healthy finished compost empowers living ecosystems to sequester atmospheric carbon."

"It also promotes soil health by supporting soil structure, which in turn reduces soil erosion, and hopefully leads to less pollution going to the Chesapeake Bay," says Weyand.

Not only that, compost lessens the need for chemical fertilizers and quells plant diseases and pests. And, by conserving water and reducing the need to purchase commercial fertilizer, it could save you money if you use your own compost at home.

Don't have the time or space to maintain a home compost pile? You can still commit to reducing food waste by dropping off scraps at a collection site located outside of the Public Works facility at 800 Rabbit Road. It's accessible 24/7 and the service is free of charge.

Since August 2018, more than 1,300 pounds of food scraps have been collected at this drop-off site. "Helping the environment is about making small changes that result in big differences," says Weyand. "Small scale composting is easy to start and gets families into a green routine."

It's a good idea to keep a small container on the kitchen counter for daily use and a larger container outside or under the sink for longer storage. "BPI Certified Compostable bag liners can help keep this process odor-free and easier to clean," says Wescott. **Never drop off items in non-compostable plastic bags, which are the greatest source of contamination at the drop-off site.** "Biodegradable is not the same as compostable," says Wescott. "No plastic of any kind is accepted in our containers."

Food waste is collected weekly by Key Compost and is processed in West Virginia. A new facility will be opening in Frederick, Md. later this year. "The food waste is blended with carbon rich material such as straw or wood chips, and turned frequently," says Wescott. "The time to completion is usually around three months. We often opt for longer cure times (up to a year) to assure a high quality finished product, which is then shared with our residential customers or sold."

"The end-result of natural composting is a dark substance called humus, a collection of resilient organic compounds," says Weyand. "Humus has an incredible ability to hold large amounts of both nutrient ions and water molecules. For this reason, small amounts of humus can remarkably increase the soil's capacity to support plant growth."

The City's program stemmed from an Environmental Affairs Committee (EAC) initiative to reduce, reuse, and recycle. "We know food scraps and yard waste together account for roughly 30 percent of what we throw away," says Weyand. "Offering composting services to residents not only reduces community waste, but also reuses organic material and recycles nutrients back into the soil profile."

The initiative has already proved popular, with a second collection bin added to the drop-off site just a few months after the program started. "The hope is to expand this service by establishing more drop-off locations around the City," says Weyand. "The EAC understands that resident accessibility is crucial for sustaining long-lasting, low-impact behaviors and habits. And, staff is dedicated to supporting residents in their efforts to make a difference and live a greener lifestyle."

Key Compost also offers a fee-based curbside pickup program more at [keycompost.com](http://keycompost.com). Explore the City's composting program at [gaithersburgmd.gov](http://gaithersburgmd.gov).

