

## Composting and Yard Waste

In 2003, the EPA estimated that each person in the U.S. contributes 4.5 pounds of garbage (municipal solid waste) daily. That equals 1,642 pounds of garbage per person per year! Much of this waste is organic and could degrade naturally if composted in aerobic conditions, saving space in landfills and reducing greenhouse gasses. Composted organic material can also be used to improve soil for lawns and gardens, further reducing the need for fertilizers. Start reaping the benefits by setting up a backyard compost pile.



### Tips for Composting

- There are many different ways to compost: the bin system, tumblers, trench composting, sheet composting, and even vermicomposting (using worms to break down material). Some methods are more simple than others.
- Add kitchen scraps from vegetables, fruits, and coffee to a compost pile. Yard waste such as leaves, lawn clippings, and other materials are also great for composting.
- Do not add pet waste, grease, meat, or dairy products to a compost pile. These items contain bacteria that may be very harmful.

### Where To Get Help for composting information

- Composting; <http://www.mda.state.md.us/pdf/tip4.pdf>
- How to Make a Compost, a Composting Guide; <http://www.compostguide.com>
- Tips and Techniques for Composting;  
<http://www.gardenguides.com/how-to/tipstechniques/planning/compost.asp>
- Composting in Your Backyard;  
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard/Compost.html>

## Pet Waste

Animal waste can easily be carried untreated by rainwater, untreated to the nearest stream or drainpipe. Pet waste contains many harmful bacteria. It is important to keep these bacteria out of drinking water sources and off the lawn. Disease causing bacteria can be harmful to your pet and your family. Pet waste can act as a fertilizer in the water system and promote the unhealthy growth of aquatic plants, including algae. The increased abundance of aquatic plant life can rob other aquatic life of much needed oxygen.

When walking the dog, take a plastic bag along. Pick up the pet waste and flush it down the toilet, where it will be properly treated. If flushing is not an option, dig a small trench in the yard, layer pet waste with leaves, grass clippings, and dirt. Do not put pet waste down the storm drain!



### Where To Get Help for pet waste information

- Pet Waste and Water Quality;  
<http://www.agnr.umd.edu/CES/Pubs/PDF/FS703.pdf>
- Are You Polluting? Pet Waste and Water Quality;  
<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/GWQ006.pdf>
- Five Important Reasons to Clean Up Pet Waste;  
[http://www.drsfostersmith.com/Articles/clean\\_up\\_waste.cfm](http://www.drsfostersmith.com/Articles/clean_up_waste.cfm)

## Keeping a Healthy Lawn

In the pursuit of maintaining green, weed-free lawns, some homeowners may over-apply fertilizer to encourage vigorous growth and pesticides to control weeds, insects, and diseases. According to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, there are over 685,000 acres of residential lawns statewide. Of that, 675,000 acres surround single-family homes and the remaining 10,000 acres are townhouse yards. If everyone over-fertilizes their lawn by just one pound, a huge amount of excess nutrients ends up in groundwater, streams, rivers, reservoirs and the Chesapeake Bay. Excessive nutrients cause serious water quality problems.

Soil fertility should be tested before seeding a new lawn and every 3 years for an established lawn to determine the amount of fertilizer and lime needed. Do-It-Yourself kits can be used, or for more accurate results contact a local soil testing laboratory.

Before establishing a lawn, consider whether turf grass is suitable. Heavily shaded or severely sloped areas may not provide the conditions needed for turf, leading to erosion, pest, and nutritional problems. Cecil County is located in planting zone 7. Fescue and zoysia are drought resistant grasses that are recommended for Cecil County. Warm-season grasses turn brown when temperatures get cold and will turn green again when temperatures reach 70 degrees. Cool-season grasses tend to turn brown in drought conditions, but turn green again when water is available.



Fertilizer-free and pesticide-free lawns are the best choice for the environment. Both time and money can be saved by reducing the frequency of fertilizing and applying pesticides. When fertilizers and pesticides are needed, experts recommend application for cool season lawns in early fall. Slow release fertilizers and low or no phosphorus fertilizers are optimal to promote a healthy environment. New lawns may require large amounts of phosphorus, but once established, require much less. Be sure not to over fertilize the lawn.

## Lawn Care Tips

- Ground covers or planting islands (areas with groupings of trees, shrubs and flowers) may be better suited for problem areas than turf.
- It is better to spread two or three smaller applications of fertilizers spaced a month apart (early September, October, and November), than one larger application.
- Do not apply fertilizer to frozen ground or dormant turf (especially when cool season grasses turn brown during summer droughts).
- Apply only the recommended amounts of fertilizer. Use no more than one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn per application. Keep fertilizer off of paved areas by sweeping it back onto the grass.
- Mow at an appropriate height to maintain a healthy lawn. Mowing too short may reduce root and stem development and encourage weed problems. The proper mowing height helps to reduce weeds by as much as 50-80%. Maintaining the grass height at 2 ½ inches, or taller, helps keep the soil cool and provides drought protection.
- Using a mulching blade on the lawn mower will keep the grass clippings on the lawn, which helps naturally fertilize the lawn.
- If you must water your lawn, water slowly in order to wet the soil to a depth of 4"-6". Prevent runoff from leaving your property. Early morning is the best time for watering. Light, frequent watering or watering in the evening can actually damage your lawn.

### Where To Get Help for lawn care information

- Maryland Cooperative Extension Lawn and Landscaping;  
<http://extension.umd.edu/publications/Category.cfm?ID=L>
- Use Fertilizers Wisely; <http://www.mda.state.md.us/pdf/Tip2.pdf>
- Maryland Cooperative Extension Cecil County Office; 410-996-5280;  
<http://cecil.umd.edu>
- USDA Planting Zones for Maryland;  
<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/hzm-ne1.html>
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation: Bay Friendly Lawn Care;  
<http://www.cbf.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=10443>
- Choosing a Lawn Care Service That's Right for You and the Chesapeake Bay  
<http://www.mda.state.md.us/pdf/lawncare.pdf>

## Keeping Water Away From Your House and Basement

Drainage of surface and subsurface water is an important concern for every homeowner. One key factor in proper drainage is the permeability of the soil on your property—the ability of the soil to transmit water or air. For example, soils that are high in clay content usually have low permeability. Another factor in good drainage is proper grading, so that gentle slopes convey runoff away from the house and basement, and water is not left standing against walls or causing water pressure to build up under the basement floor.

Wet basements can be the result of water passing through cracks in the basement walls, through the joint between the basement wall and the floor, or through the basement window well. Flowerbeds and foundation plantings may hold water against the walls.

Check the exterior grading to make sure that rainwater will flow away from the house. When re-grading, avoid placing soil against wood or siding. Grading in excess of 5,000 square feet requires a County permit. For more information, contact the Cecil County Government Department of Planning and Zoning at 410-996-5220 or [http://www.ccgov.org/dept\\_planning](http://www.ccgov.org/dept_planning).



*Image Credit: Downspout Products*

<http://www.gutterworks.com/downspoutproducts.html>

Inspect all areas where the downspouts from the gutters around the house discharge onto the ground. Twice a year, clean out all gutters and down spouts to prevent overflows that will drip water too near the foundation. Because the flow from a downspout will be forceful in a storm, make sure that the area where flow drains across the ground is adequately protected with either sturdy vegetation or even stone or gravel in extreme situations.

## From My Backyard to Our Bay

Usually, a splash block of concrete or plastic placed directly under the downspout outfall will absorb the initial force of the water gushing from the downspout. This will help disperse the water's erosive energy and move it away from the foundation.

In some situations, due to poorly drained soils in low-lying areas or difficult terrain, the only solution may be an underground drainage system. Such a system involves digging a ditch about 2-3 feet deep from the wet area to an adequate outfall down the slope (where the drainage pipe emerges from the ground). The ditch is first lined with "landscape fabric" (material available at garden centers that will allow water but not soil particles to pass through). Then a layer of 3 to 4 inches of gravel is installed, followed by a length of perforated, corrugated plastic drainage pipe that is covered with more gravel. After covering the gravel with landscape fabric, the top 6 inches or so is filled with soil and sod.

The new drainage system will draw water from the surface down to the level of the drainage pipe. The landscape fabric prevents sediment from filling in the void spaces in the gravel core and retarding water flow. Place mesh or screen across the end of the drainage pipe at the outfall to prevent animals from entering. Make sure that the area below the outfall of the system is adequately protected with vegetation or gravel to prevent the formation of a gully.

To help prevent surface water from standing in your yard, maintain a slight slope that drains toward a swale (an earthen channel) or storm drain. When you concentrate runoff erosive potential increases, so maintaining a stand of sturdy vegetation in the swale to prevent formation of a gully is important.

### **Where To Get Help** for drainage information

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Drainage Around Your Home;  
<http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/e-resources/ebooks/records/edt7322.html>  
410-398-4411 ext. 3
- Landscapes that Help the Chesapeake Bay;  
<http://extension.umd.edu/publications/PDFs/FS701.pdf>
- New York Times, Home and Garden;  
<http://landscaping.about.com/b/2004/03/18/drainage-problems-and-soil-grading.htm>