Backyard Composting: An Even *Better* Way to Recycle Yard Trim.

In Montgomery County, it's against the law to dispose of yard trimmings (grass, leaves, brush, and garden trimmings) in the trash.

Since 1994, the County has collected yard trim materials placed in paper lawn bags or in reusable containers at the curb and taken them to the Montgomery County Shady Grove Processing Facility and Transfer Station. From there the materials are transported to the County's Composting Facility in Dickerson, where yard trim materials are composted into beneficial soil conditioner products called Leafgro and Compro.

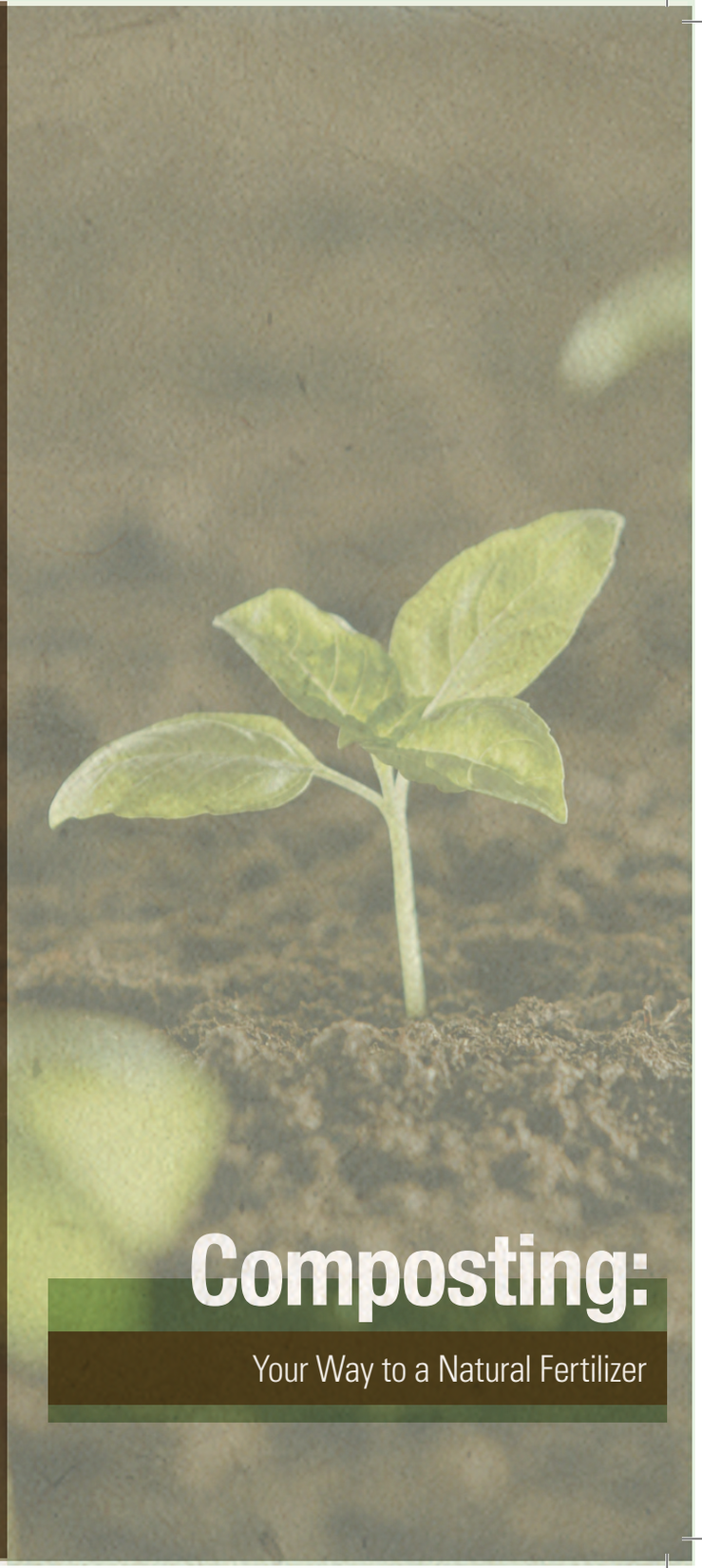
However, by composting your yard trim materials in your backyard, you will be helping to reduce the amount of material that the County needs to process at its facilities. Through an agreement with the residents in the Dickerson community, up to 77,000 tons annually of yard trim materials can be processed at the Composting Facility. Any excess amount of yard trim materials must then be delivered to other composting/recycling facilities at additional costs.

Montgomery County, Maryland
Division of Solid Waste Services
Waste Reduction and Recycling Section

101 Monroe Street, 6th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850
Phone: 3-1-1 or (240) 777-0311 outside Montgomery County
TTY: 240-773-3556
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/recycling

This information is available in an alternate format by calling Alan Pultyniewicz at 240.777.6480.

Printed on recycled and recyclable paper.



Composting:

Your Way to a Natural Fertilizer

Backyard Composting. It's Only Natural.

Composting transforms your yard and garden trimmings—grass clippings, leaves, and pruning material—into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling material that naturally enriches the earth.

When you compost, you create an environment for microscopic organisms to break down dry, carbon-rich "brown" material, such as fallen leaves and wood chips; and wet, nitrogen-rich "green" material, including grass and flowers. Along with air and water, the carbon and nitrogen materials decompose and create a high-nutrient compost to use for your lawn and garden.

Why Compost?

- **Beautify your lawn.** Compost improves soil structure, texture, and fertility so your plants and lawn thrive. It also improves water retention by holding almost twice its weight in water.
- **Protect the environment.** Compost protects our waterways by slowing runoff from rain and melting snow, preventing soil erosion, and trapping sediments and chemicals. And unlike many commercial fertilizers, compost won't leach chemicals into the ground.
- **Reduce costs.** Composting reduces the need to buy commercial fertilizers, and lawn care service providers may charge less if you ask them to stop collecting your yard trim and pass the savings on to you.

Start Composting Today!

- **Pick your spot.** Use a level, well-drained space in your yard in either sun or shade. Avoid setting up your compost bin over shallow tree roots, near wooden structures, and at your neighbor's property line.
- **Add "brown" and "green" material.** Mix carbon-rich "brown" materials such as dry leaves, straw, and wood chips, with nitrogen-rich "green" materials including flowers, pruning material, and grass clippings. Brown material can be composted alone, but the nitrogen in green material speeds the decomposition process. (Don't use nitrogen sources alone as they can create odor problems.)
- **When in doubt, leave it out!** Do not add diseased plants, pet waste, meat, bones, fat, oils, dairy products, processed foods, and weeds that are in bloom or have seed heads.
- **Build your pile.** Most compost bins are three feet high—the optimum height to ensure the most efficient rate of composting. Compost piles must be large enough to prevent the rapid loss of heat and moisture, but small enough to allow for proper air circulation.
- **Water lightly.** Moisten the materials as you add them and then leave a concave depression at the top of the pile to collect rainwater. Keep it moist—but not wet—to promote bacterial growth. Too much moisture can kill microorganisms and slow decomposition. If your compost bin is in a sunny location, you'll need to check the moisture content more frequently.

- **Mix it up.** Turn your compost pile every few weeks, moving the dry materials from the edges into the middle of the pile. When adding new materials—especially green material like grass—be sure to thoroughly mix them in. Turning the materials in the pile will speed up the decomposition process.
- **Use your compost.** After the materials break down, you will have dark brown-black, crumbly, sweet-smelling compost. Use it as a top-dressing for your lawn or mulch for trees and shrubs—or mix it in the soil for growing annuals, herbs, and vegetables.

Composting Myths: Get the Facts.

Myth: Composting is expensive.

Fact: Montgomery County offers residents composting bins at no additional charge. For a list of updated pick-up locations visit www.montgomerycountymd.gov/recycling.

Myth: Composting causes odors.

Fact: A well-maintained compost pile smells as sweet as the forest floor. Odors happen because of mistakes such as poor drainage, a lack of aeration, or the need for more dry "brown" materials in the pile.

Myth: Composting attracts rodents and pests.

Fact: Yard trimmings won't attract rodents. Just keep food scraps out!