What is a Watershed?

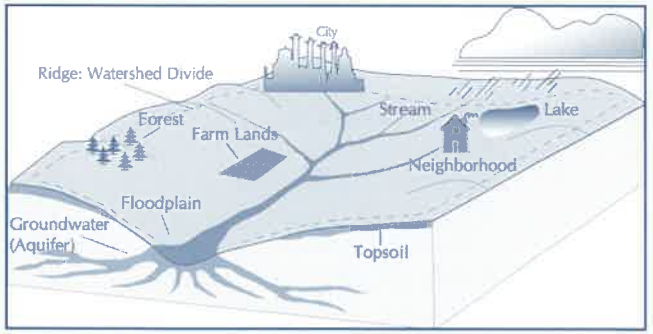
A watershed is an area of land that drains to a common point, such as a nearby creek, stream, river or lake. Every small watershed drains to a larger watershed that eventually flows to the ocean.

Watersheds support a wide variety of plants and wildlife and provide many outdoor recreation opportunities. Protecting the health of our watersheds preserves and enhances the quality of life for Kansas City area residents.

What is Stormwater Runoff?

Stormwater is water from rain or melting snow. It flows from rooftops, over paved streets, sidewalks and parking lots, across bare soil, and through lawns and storm drains. As it flows, runoff collects and transports soil, pet waste, salt, pesticides, fertilizer, oil and grease, litter and other pollutants. This water drains directly into nearby creeks, streams and rivers, without receiving treatment at sewage plants.

Polluted stormwater contaminates local waterways. It can harm plants, fish and wildlife, while degrading the quality of water.



A typical watershed system

MARC
Mid-America Regional Council
600 Broadway, Suite 300
Kansas City, Missouri 64105

For more information, visit www.marc.org/water or call 816/474-4240.

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Making and Using Compost

Autumn Watershed Tip

Help keep yard waste and kitchen scraps out of landfills and waterways

Good Neighbors Care About Clean Water

What is compost?

Many of the kitchen scraps that we send down the disposal and much of the yard wastes we dispose of can be put to better use as compost. Compost is decomposed organic material made from such ingredients as leaves, grass clippings, shredded twigs and some kitchen scraps. Composting is a practical and convenient way to reuse your lawn, garden and certain household wastes.

The composting process involves four main components: organic matter, moisture, oxygen, and bacteria. Organic matter includes plant materials and some animal manures. Moisture is important to support decomposition. Oxygen accelerates the breakdown of plant material.

Once all the components are in place, a complex feeding pattern begins that involves hundreds of different organisms, including bacteria, fungi, worms and insects. What remains after these organisms break down organic refuse is the rich compost that nourishes lawns and gardens.

The benefits of using compost

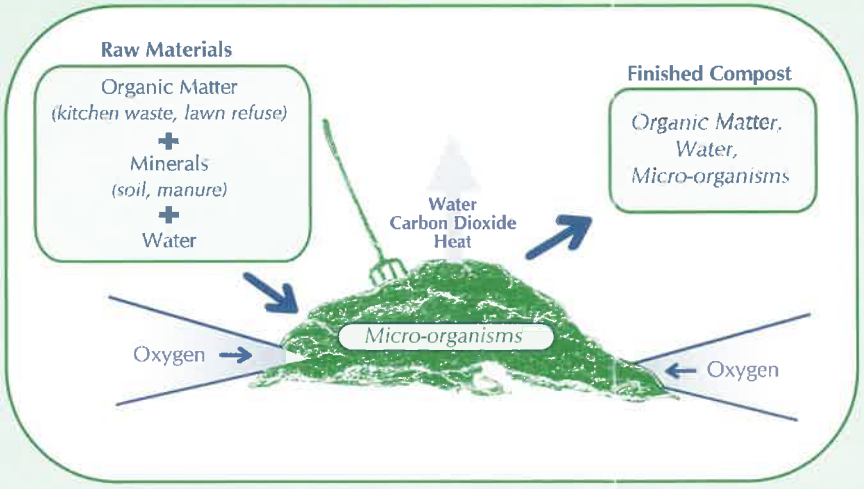
Homeowners often have difficulty disposing of leaves, grass clippings and other garden refuse. In many states, it is illegal to dump lawn waste in landfills, and disposing of it in storm drains, lakes, rivers and streams clogs drains and pollutes water.

Instead of filling landfills and polluting local waterways with this waste, citizens can benefit from it. Backyard composting of organic waste creates natural soil additives for use on lawns and gardens, and around the house. Other benefits of using organic compost:

- Reduces soil erosion and water runoff
- Assists soil in holding nutrients, which reduces the need for fertilizers
- Promotes healthier plants that are less susceptible to disease and insects
- Improves water absorption into soil and by plants
- With the addition of compost, sandy soils hold water better, and clay soils drain faster

Make your own compost pile

- Locate your pile on a well-drained site which would benefit from nutrient runoff, but avoid areas adjacent to streams and other waterways.
- To ensure good aeration, start your pile with a three-inch layer of course plant material such as small twigs, or use a wooden pallet.
- Build successive layers of leaves, grass clippings, food scraps, and other green matter. For more rapid decomposition, chop and mix components together.
- Cover layers with 1–2 inches of soil or manure to add nitrogen to the process.
- During dry weather, keep the pile moist. In cold winter months, cover the pile with black plastic to insulate and shed excess water.
- Mix compost with a pitchfork after six weeks. This helps aerate the pile, and keeps the bacterial processes from overheating.



What can you compost?

To achieve the healthiest compost, you will need the right mix of ingredients. Here are some ideas for ingredients to include and those to avoid:

Stuff to include

- Grass clippings and leaves
- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Tea bags and coffee grounds
- Fireplace ashes
- Vacuum cleaner lint
- Straw/hay
- Wood chips and sawdust
- Shredded newspaper

Stuff to avoid

- Diseased plants
- Human and pet waste
- Chemically treated wood products
- Barbecue grill ash
- Meat and fish scraps and bones
- Oils and other fatty food products
- Milk products
- Pernicious weeds

** Check with your local government to see if there are code requirements for building a compost pile in your community.*