SOCWA HEALTHY LANDSCAPE TIP SHEET:

BENEFITS OF COMPOST FOR WATER QUALITY

Composting…Nature's Way with Waste

Through the natural process of decomposition, organic materials are transformed into the soil-building material called compost.

In the forest, leaves and other materials decompose and help sustain plant growth. The same natural materials can be deliberately mixed together to produce compost for home lawns and gardens.

Finished compost, composed of over 30% organic matter by dry weight, is an ideal soil conditioner. When added to the soil, compost continues to decompose, slowly releasing nutrients that can be absorbed by delicate roots.

Because flowers, vegetables and grasses are picked and harvested, compost needs to be added to the soil each year.

Compost Benefits for Healthy Soils and Pollution Prevention

Compost is called gardener's gold because it enhances the productivity and fertility of soil. When used on a sustained basis over several years, compost provides a reservoir of nutrients that are continuously available for plants.

The following benefits help water quality for lakes, streams and wetlands in Southeast Michigan:

- Increases the water-holding capacity of sandy soils.
- Enhances the permeability of clay soils.
- Slowly releases nutrients.
- Improves soil structure and tilth.
- Restores microbial populations.
- Suppresses certain soil-borne diseases.
- Prevents soil erosion.
- Degrades petroleum products, pesticides, and hydrocarbons in contaminated soils.
- Binds heavy metals carried by storm water runoff, helping to protect water quality.

Compost can be used in flower and vegetable gardens, on the lawn, in containers, as a mulch over bulb plantings, and around trees and shrubs.