

“Chicago Recycles: Yard Waste” Video Text

The blue cart recycling program also collects yard waste to be turned into compost. Compost is made by gathering plant material such as leaves and grass clippings and letting it decompose as a result of bacteria, fungi, and other organisms. The result is a rich, natural fertilizer. If you have a lot of green space on your property, yard waste will make up a significant portion of what you throw away. You can help reduce the amount of yard waste you produce by taking a few simple steps. Set your mower blades higher and let the clippings lie so you don't have to bag them. You can also use your leaves, sticks, and grass as bedding around your garden. Composting allows that material to be turned into a resource while reducing space in our landfills and greenhouse gas emissions.

Chicagoans can also choose to compost at home which can be done in a couple of different ways. There is vermicomposting where worms eat your food scraps and the finished product is compost. You can also compost outside where you can collect both food scraps and yard waste. Whichever way you compost, you're helping keep material from our landfill and reducing emissions. Because compostable materials make up about one third of what we throw away, you can significantly reduce your waste. You can learn more about home composting at www.chicagorecycles.org

The blue cart program collects yard waste seasonally. From April 1st through the end of November, the Department of Streets and Sanitation sends out an additional truck to collect yard waste. Yard waste is picked up every other week on the same week that your blue cart is collected. In order to have your yard waste collected and composted, you must have your yard waste in either plastic or paper bags and set them next to your garbage and recycling carts. Both types of bags are accepted, but paper is preferred because it can be composted along with the yard waste. When possible, please use a clear or translucent plastic bag so crews can identify the content and not mistake the bag for garbage. Place branches and sticks that don't easily fit inside a bag next to your cart. The yard waste crews will drive through the alley and curb collection routes looking for bags sitting outside the carts, and load them into the truck if they contain yard waste.

Once the yard waste is collected, it is taken to a compost facility. First, the yard waste is prepped for composting by having the plastic bags and other contaminants removed. Next, it is piled into long narrow mounded rows called windrows, where the material is allowed to sit and break down. Occasionally the rows are turned and after a number of weeks the yard waste is decomposed into a crumbly soil-like material that is rich in nutrients and can be used as a natural fertilizer.