



What's Cooking!

TOP OF THE HEAP

At last, the summer doldrums. Time to relax and take a look around at what's been happening. Unless, of course, you have been too busy for a doldrums, in which case our newsletter will catch you up on what's cooking in the world of compost (or at least the Peninsula of compost). Check out the article on the MACA educational display, Dot Abbott-Donnelly and Maggie Moor-Orth have done a wonderful job keeping our booth on the road, helping to educate the populace on compost. Thank you ladies, for your dedicated efforts.

The first thing I would like to report to you is the success of our new member drive. Ann Bleinberger has done a terrific job building our ranks. For the first time we have a substantive paid member list. Our current membership is listed inside and will be posted on our website.

The second item is very exciting, and that is the decision of the Virginia compost association to join MACA. This development challenges us to rework the organization to be a cohesive regional association while still maintaining local dynamics. There will be dialogue at the annual meeting as to forming this working relationship and developing new goals.

This brings us to the next topic- elections for new Board members. Nominations are being sought. If you have an interest in serving or would like to nominate someone for the job, please call Helen Waite (nominating committee).

Our annual meeting is coming up soon and will take place at Chesapeake College on September 28th. We have a good program set (see inside for details). An added bonus for compost operators seeking recertification — The Maryland Department of Agriculture will recognize attendance at the annual meeting as satisfying requirement for recertification. All those attending the annual meeting are encouraged to join the association or renew their memberships at registration.

The Board will hold a meeting on August 29th to address agenda items for the business meeting portion of the annual meeting. The hot topic is the melding of Virginia into the MACA. How to overcome distance to accomplish mutual goals. If you have thoughts on what other topics should be discussed at the annual meeting, please call me.

Remember-
Make Compost the First Amendment to
Your Soil's Constitution.

Sincerely yours,

C. Patrick Condon

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2001 – A COMPOSTING ODYSSEY

THEME FOR MID-ATLANTIC COMPOSTING ASSOCIATION MEETING SEPTEMBER 28, 2001

Exploring composting options in the 21st Century - 2001 - A Composting Odyssey - is the theme of the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Composting Association on Friday, September 28th from 9 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. in the Kent Humanities Building, Chesapeake College at Wye Mills, Maryland. Vermicomposting – composting with earthworms; marketing of compost products; U.S. Composting Council's Testing Assurance program and composting regulations on a national, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia state levels will be topics covered.

The annual meeting, cosponsored by University of Maryland Cooperative Extension, will feature nationally and regionally known composting experts. Dr. Scott Subler of the Pacific Garden Company, will join Dr. Lori Marsh, a Vermicomposting researcher at Virginia Tech. University and Hetty Franke, a Delaware Master Composter and Master Gardener on composting with worms, both commercially and in the back yard.

...Continued on Page 2

ANNUAL MEETING THEME: 2001 – A COMPOSTING ODYSSEY

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Tait Saderholm, Leafgro Marketing Specialist with the Maryland Environmental Service and Joe Waters of the Small Business Development Center at Salisbury University will discuss marketing strategies for compost sales and developing a business plan for a composting operation.

Developing national standards for compost and compost testing has been an effort of the U.S. Composting Council. David Hill, of U.S. Filter Company and chairman of the U.S. Composting Council's Compost Testing Assurance Program committee and a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Composting Council will bring an update on efforts to establish national composting standards and testing program.

Regulatory issues regarding compost operations in the Mid-Atlantic states will be covered by a panel presentation of government representatives. Mike Dieter of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality will review Virginia's recently developed composting regulations. Don Lewis from the Maryland Dept. of Agriculture and Jim Short from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control will update the program attendees on changes in their respective state's regulations. A perspective on composting on a Federal level will be provided by Mike Guiranna, for the U.S. EPA Region III office in Philadelphia.

Registration costs for the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Composting Association will be \$20 which will include a catered lunch and materials. Pre-registration deadline is September 20th. Registration the day of the program will be \$30. To register please complete the registration form on page 7 and return it to the address on the form. Make checks payable to "University of Maryland". For more information contact K. Marc Tefreau, Regional Extension Specialist at the Wye Research and Education Center at 410.827.8056, e-mail at kt4@umail.umd.edu or the Mid-Atlantic Composting Association web site at www.delmarvacompost.org.

The Mid-Atlantic Composting Association is a non-profit educational and industry organization of commercial compost producers, university and government representatives, landscapers and others interested in composting and compost utilization in agricultural crop production and landscape uses. The Mid-Atlantic Composting Association includes Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Virginia. For more information about the association, contact the President of MACA, Pat Condon at New Earth Services in Cambridge, Maryland at 410.221.6057.

MACA ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA

Friday, September 28, 2001
Chesapeake College, Wye Mills, Maryland
Registration fee: \$20 per person

8:30 a.m. Registration

9:00 a.m. Welcome and Introductions

9:10 - 10:20 a.m. Session 1

Vermicomposting – Commercial and Home

Dr. Scott Subler, Pacific Garden Company

Dr. Lori S. Marsh, Virginia Tech

Hetty Franke, Delaware Master Composter

10:20 - 10:40 a.m. Break

10:40 - 11:20 a.m. Session 2

Marketing of Compost Products

Tait Saderholm, Maryland Environmental Service

Joe Waters, Small Business Development Center,
Salisbury University

11:20 a.m. - 12:00 noon Session 3

Update on Compost Testing Assurance Program
and U.S. Composting Council Activities

David Hill, U.S. Composting Council
Board of Directors

12 noon - 1 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. Session 4

Regulatory Update – Federal and State

Mike Dieter, VA. Dept. of Environmental Quality

Don Lewis, Maryland Dept. of Agriculture

Jim Short, Delaware DNREC

Mike Guiranna, U.S. EPA Region III

2:00 - 3:00 p.m. Session 5

MACA Annual Business Meeting and
Planning Session

Pat Condon, MACA President

3:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. Session 6

Program Wrap-up and Questions and Answers

MID-ATLANTIC COMPOSTING ASSOCIATION MEETING JULY 20TH

by Bob Kerlinger, *Compost A Peal*

Dear Members and Members To Be,

Our reorganization meeting on May 9th at Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg was well attended and successful judging from the comments afterwards. A tour of the Owen and Wayne Wenger's farm was followed by a wonderful lunch furnished by Greg Evanylo and then our meeting. The following are some of the highlights of the meeting that had to do with our reorganization. For a copy of the complete minutes please e-mail a request to bkerlinger@widomaker.com or it will also be available at our up-coming annual meeting on September 28th.

The group voted unanimously to join with the Maryland and Delaware composters in forming the Mid-Atlantic Composting Association (MACA). Our Virginia group will operate within that organization and will be known by the designation MACA-VA.

We will meet twice a year by ourselves in Virginia and once a year with the entire MACA organization for an annual meeting.

A MACA logo is being developed and we approved of the preliminary artwork.

MACA has begun the process of filing for a 501-3C tax-exempt which would cover all the MACA organization.

We have accepted the current dues structure being used by MACA, which has a \$35, \$100 and \$150 level. We will collect our own dues and then send into the MACA treasurer our part of the overall operating cost for the whole organization which has been determined to be \$100 for the first year until we get on our feet.

MACA-VA will send two of our officers to each MACA board meeting to represent our group.

We voted to add a treasurer to our group and now have the following officers:

- Chairman: Bob Kerlinger
- Vice Chairman: Dr. Rosalie Green
- Secretary: Paul Roth
- Treasurer: Mark Friedrich

We discussed our committee's, made some changes, and came up with the following:

- **Market Development, Technical Standards, Research, Information, and Education**
Chairman: Dr. Rosalie Green
Members: Greg Evanylo, John Strause, and Bob Lane
- **Regulation and Legislative**
Chairman: Bill Stinson
Members: Bob Broom, Frank Huckaby, and Mike Dieter as an informal member.
- **Membership**
Chairman: Mark Friedrich, Bob Kerlinger, and Paul Roth.

Greg Evanylo volunteered to work with MACA on the annual meeting.

Mike Dieter will compare state regulations with Don Lewis of MACA-MD/DE to begin a cooperative effort and see if we can standardize composting regulations between the states to some degree.

We now have 22 paid members of our new MACA-VA organization. If you have already joined, congratulations; if you have not, why not join today. We want everyone interested in any phase of composting to join with us because together we can make a much bigger difference than we can individually. If you do not have a membership information and application, please e-mail Mark Friedrich at mafriedrich@mindspring.com and request one.

Don't forget our next meeting which is our annual meeting. It will be held at Chesapeake College, Wye Mills, Maryland on September 28, 2001.

A complete annual meeting information package will be sent to you automatically sometime in August.

WARRINGTON FUNDS GRANTED FOR DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

The Warrington Foundation funded two demonstration projects for the year 2001. Both projects are currently being conducted by Maryland Cooperative Extension at the Central Maryland Research and Education Center. "The Utilization of Composted Manure and Yard Waste in Turfgrass Establishment and Maintenance" (\$3,900) is the first year of a multi-year demonstration of the utilization of compost on urban lawns. Contact Wanda MacLachlan wt4@uamail.umd.edu for additional information. "Demonstrating and Evaluating Animal Manure Composts for Growing Containerized Vegetables" (\$3,200) is a demonstration of patio gardening with compost for urban homeowners. Contact Jon Traunfeld jt46@uamail.umd.edu for additional information.

HAVE YOU SEEN US?

by Dot Abbott-Donnelly, Extension Agent-Renewable Resources, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension

The Mid-Atlantic Composting Association has been actively promoting composting around Delaware through our nomadic display. Targeted towards the urban homeowner, the MACA display provides interested individuals a chance to experience various types of commercial compost and educates them on the value of small-scale home composters.

The MACA display proudly participated in the Ag Day/Earth Day celebration at the Dover Mall on April 22, 2001. Formerly known as the Delaware Department of Agriculture "Ag Day", this year's event combined forces to also celebrate EARTH DAY.

Helen Waite and Ed Meade volunteered their expertise and staffed the display through the day's activities. Next year the Delaware Department of Agriculture is looking to combine this annual celebration with the ever-popular "Old Dover Days". Our exhibit participated in the 2000 Old Dover Days festivities with enormous crowd interest.

On Saturday, June 23, our display was located at Filasky's Produce Farm, west of Middletown, Delaware. The Delaware Farm Bureau named the Filaskys 'Farm Family of the Year 2000'. This year's annual event, "A Day On The Farm", was sited at a vegetable-produce farm to promote agricultural awareness within the sprawling urban communities of lower New Castle County. The weather determined the size of our audience and looming thunderstorms reduced the potential to reach over 1000 newcomers to composting. Those that did attend were drawn to the MACA display where Glenn Gladders provided a one-on-one question and answer opportunity. Folks were able to use their senses to experience biosolid, leaf litter and poultry litter compost. Almost everyone was amazed at the reduction of odor to the point of not recognizing the raw material. Glenn then discussed how each person could help the environment by composting specific organic items from their own household waste, while reducing the size of materials transported to our landfills. He showed them a 'sample' black-plastic composter and explained the process of layering the necessary nutrients, while adding specific amounts of water and allowing a heat process to 'cook' the ingredients. The end product is a rich soil amendment that, when added around existing plants, elevates plant growth by providing soil nutrients and aeration. Our MACA display added nicely to the day's experience of educating people to the values of our environment and importance of agriculture.

We will be exhibiting at the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension Education and Research Center's Farm and Home Field Day, held on August 8, at the

Georgetown facility. Stop-by and visit us in the 'grove'. Steve Ellis and Nancy Goggin will be looking for you! You are welcome to participate in the Field Day events, but need to contact the University of Delaware Georgetown office to obtain a \$6.00 lunch reservation... best picnic lunch you'll ever have!

CHESAPEAKE GARDEN HITS THE AIRWAVES

by Tait Saderholm, Maryland Environmental Service

Maryland Environmental Service, manufacturer of Leafgro® organic compost and a member of the Mid-Atlantic Compost Association, is hosting a new radio show to inform the residents of central Maryland of the benefits of compost and the art and application of gardening and the surrounding environment. The weekly show is named Chesapeake Garden and can be heard on Fridays from 11:00 a.m. to noon on AM 1430 WNAV. Chesapeake Garden runs for 13 weeks in the fall and 13 weeks in spring.

Last year, the Chesapeake Garden show covered a variety of fascinating topics related to gardening and protecting the environment. Chesapeake Garden hosted Deborah Gangloff and Gary Moll from American Forests, John Krouse from the University of Maryland's Turfgrass Research Facility and Kevin Conrad from the National Arboretum, to name a few. In keeping with the belief that an informed general public is the advantageous to the compost industry, Chesapeake Garden also had guest appearances by Pat Condon of New Earth Services manufacturers of Chesapeake Blue® and David Hill of U.S. Filter manufacturers of Orgro®. Most of the shows are formatted as a discussion between the host, Tait Saderholm of MES, and the guest of the day.

After a summer hiatus Chesapeake Garden will hit the airwaves again beginning August 24th. MACA members are encouraged to contact MES if you have a topic "about the art and application of gardening and the surrounding environment" that you would like to discuss. Please call Tait Saderholm or Ann Bleinberger of Maryland Environmental Service at 888.214.8687 or email psade@menv.com.

Chesapeake Garden

Starting on August 24th

11:30 a.m. on AM 1430 WNAV



COMPOSTING IN COSTA RICA

Pat Condon and Herb Brodie had an interesting visit to Costa Rica in April to view the composting efforts of a large orange plantation. Del Oro, Ltd. maintains approximately 7,500 acres of orange groves and processes orange and pineapple juice. The processing waste consisting of squeezed oranges and pineapples plus reject fruit is being composted for recycling onto the orange groves.

There were several barriers to good composting in the region that had to be overcome. First, the climate is divided into a dry season and a wet season. February through May receives little rain while the remainder of the year receives 50 to over 125 inches of rainfall. Open windrow composting can occur only during the dry season and wet season waste production is stored in very large roofed trench silos. The second barrier is the lack of nitrogenous feedstock to mix with the processing waste. The citrus waste has a very low pH and a C:N in the 40's. The addition of lime and a longer composting time allows for a slow odor free compost process. A better compost product could be made if there was a source of poultry or animal manure but none is available.



A third barrier was placed by regulatory insistence. Del Oro had constructed a compost pad that would be the source of envy by many composters. The site was clean, well graded, with water diversion and collection (even though the compost was made only in the dry season). An interesting regulation is that clean runoff diverted from entering the site still had to be collected and pumped for stream discharge at the upstream border of the Del Oro's property. While following the Ministry of Environment permit requirements and collecting required water quality and air quality data that showed no impact, Del Oro was under order of the Ministry of Health which placed restrictions on the pad use such that only about a quarter of the site could be used. This severely compromised the ability to properly compost the waste.

While driving back to San Jose (the roads are no picnic in Costa Rica) a different situation was found at a small community supporting production of poultry manure compost. A progressive farmer constructed a large poultry operation only after an agreement with the local community was worked out in which the manure is composted and sold by a cooperative of community residents. In this instance a potential social and environmental conflict between the community and the poultry producer was turned into a successful business partnership.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS — 2002 WARRINGTON GRANTS

The Warrington Foundation will provide funds for a limited number of small demonstration projects for the year 2002. Warrington's primary focus is to improve the utilization of Delmarva poultry litter nutrients as compost. Applicable projects must include the goal of consumer education to improve the market potential for poultry litter based compost. Activities can include exhibits, plots and gardens, meetings or other educational activities. Demonstrations showing plant response to compost use must include scientific measurements such as soil tests, compost quality and application rate, weather and other parameters to define the conditions of the demonstration. Projects should be located in the urban regions surrounding the Delmarva peninsula.

Warrington funds are available to any educational institution, agency, garden club or other organized non-profit group. Proposals should be no more than four pages in length and contain a concise description of the proposed activity including: how the activity will improve consumer knowledge; how the activity will be presented to consumers; what measurements will be made; a brief description of those conducting the activity; and itemized expected project expenditures. Requested budgets should be less than \$1,500. The budgets of selected projects may be increased through negotiation for increased activity depending on the total number of projects funded.

Send proposals as an MS Word, Wordperfect or PDF file via e-mail to hbrodie@bluecrab.org by December 31, 2001.

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY IN COMPOST

by Francis R. Gouin, Professor Emeritus,
University of Maryland, College Park

If your primary purpose for composting is volume reduction, you should not attempt to market your product to the ornamental horticultural industries. If your purpose for composting is to manufacture compost for the horticultural industries, it is important that you establish standards that will result in the highest quality compost possible. If some of the compost you produce cannot meet the highest possible standards, it can always be marketed at a lower price to horticultural industries with less demanding needs; however, this is a smaller market.

The ornamental horticulture industry is the second largest economic agricultural industry in this country. It utilizes vast quantities of peat moss, barks, topsoil and fertilizers in the production, establishment and maintenance of ornamental plants. Except for topsoil, the most commonly used sources of organic matter used by these industries are peat moss and milled pine bark which are generally void of nutrients essential for plant growth, and most instances must be imported and are not always readily available. These industries also utilize large quantities of fertilizers, especially water soluble and slow-release fertilizers that are costly.

What distinguishes the ornamental horticulture industries from all other horticultural and other agricultural industries is that the plants it produces must be capable of continuing growth after sale and that once established in the landscape they will increase in value with time. Therefore it is important to know that these horticultural crops are high value crops and growers and users of compost cannot afford losses.

The quality of compost used by most of the horticultural industries is highly dependent on the crops to be grown and the cultural methods used. There are some ornamental horticultural crops that demand heavy use of organic materials to replenish that which is lost in harvesting and marketing. The harvesting of a single acre of nursery stock by digging with a ball of soil around the roots (balling) results in the loss of 200 to 250 tons of top soil with each crop. This means that repeated harvesting of such fields rapidly depletes the native top soils and reduces production efficiency for succeeding crops. Because the compost is being added to soil, it need not be of the highest quality.

Thus ornamental horticulture can utilize two different qualities of compost. Growers who produce their crops in soil and growers who grow their plants in containers or nurserymen who utilize compost for the installation and maintenance of landscapes. The compost that is used by home gardeners must also be of the highest quality. In addition to requiring compost of the highest quality, these industries also demand that the compost be uniformly consistent.

The reason why growers who produce their crops in soil can utilize a lower grade of compost is because most soils contain clay and clays can buffer (commonly known as cation exchange capacity) many of the antagonistic compounds and adverse C:N found in lower grades of compost. Such compost may contain high or low pH's, excess soluble salts, alcohols, high levels of tannic acids and or acetic acid and above acceptable maximum C:N ratios, etc.

Because most potting mixes have a very low cation exchange capacity, the amendments added must be within tolerable range of plants to be grown. This means the pH must either be near ideal or easily adjusted, soluble salt levels must be known and only sufficient compost added to meet maximum tolerable level, the compost must have a C:N level that will not compete with nitrogen needs of the plants and that the compost be free of alcohols and contain minimum levels of cellulose and hemicellulose and low levels of tannic and/or acetic acids. In addition compost particle size should not exceed 1/2" in length and moisture concentration should be between 45% and 50% to facilitate handling and to minimize dust problems.

Since the compost or the potting medium made with the compost is likely to be viewed by many and used with bare hands daily, weekly or monthly it must be stable, mature and uniformly consistent. It should contain minimal man-made inerts, less than a total of 2%, and be free of glass-shards, rusty-metal, and objectionable odors. A premium compost should be dark brown to black with an earthy odor.

Standards for premium quality compost may appear high, but it is important to remember that these industries will utilize the compost for many different uses by a wide variety of people with varying degrees of experience. These markets are already being served by the peat moss and milled pine bark industries, who are capable of providing a uniform and consistent products free of hazardous materials. Also growers are well experienced in the use of peat moss and milled pine bark in the production and maintenance of their crops. If the compost that you produce is inferior to

the products that already exist, you will not have a market. Compost is in direct competition with peat moss and milled pine bark for the same market and being the new kid on the block, you must prove that the compost that you manufacture is superior and its use is profitable.

The feedstock from which compost is made affects uses. The pH of most compost will be between 6.2 and 7.8. However, compost made from lime dewatered feedstock will have extremely limited horticultural uses except in soils that are extremely acid. It is not economically feasible to acidify compost that contains large amounts of liming agents. In addition to raising the pH, the addition of liming agents to feedstocks also increases the soluble salt levels, measured as electrical conductivity, of the compost. It is not recommended that feedstock that is lime dewatered be used for making compost for the ornamental horticultural industries.

In addition to supplying quality compost, as a producer, you must also be capable of providing a growing program. Since most composts are rich in nutrients, it is important that growers modify their cultural program to maximize the use of nutrients in the compost and to prevent over-fertilization problems. Therefore, successful marketing of compost necessitates developing and providing a growing program that will result in producing the highest quality plants of a wide variety of plant species, with minimal effort and use of commercial fertilizers and pesticides.

Success in marketing compost is dependent on establishing and maintaining quality standards. This means either utilizing a commercial laboratory or establishing a quality standard laboratory of your own. It means following the same recipe for blending feedstock and method of composting. Once the composting process is completed to specifications the compost is properly processed. Marketing also requires providing storage that will assure the quality of the compost is being maintained and that the compost will be protected from outside contamination by weed seeds and insects. Adequate storage also enables compost producers to maintain a readily available supply that can be delivered as specified by the buyer. The ornamental horticulture industries are highly seasonal, thus it is important that compost producers be capable of meeting peak demands by either providing adequate storage and/or create incentives for selling compost at other times when demand is normally low, if sufficient storage is not available.

Success in composting is not only dependent on being capable of manufacturing a consistent quality product, but being able to maintain that quality until the compost is delivered to the customer. This requires a thorough understanding of the industry's needs, coordination within the composting facility and determination that the compost produced is of consistent and uniform quality.



MACA 2001 ANNUAL MEETING

REGISTRATION FORM

(Please type or print legibly)

Company Name _____

Participants names(s) _____

Phone AND fax numbers with area code _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

of participants _____ x \$20 each (\$30 after September 20th and at the door) = \$ _____ enclosed.

Return the completed form before September 20, 2001 to:
Marc Tefteau, University of Maryland, WREC, P.O. Box 169, Queenstown, MD 21658

Or fax form to (410) 827-9039. Questions may be directed to: (410) 827-8056.

Make checks payable to "University of Maryland"

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Don't Forget the 10th Annual Better Composting School

October 24-26. Contact Lew Carr at 410.651.9111
or lc5@uemail.umd.edu for information.



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