



# Shore Conserver

Eastern Shore Soil & Water Conservation District • *promoting locally led conservation*  
22545 Center Parkway • Accomac, VA 23301 • (757)787-0918

**February 2015**

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## Composting and Soil Health

Compost is decayed organic matter called humus. It is the essence of soil and is what plants need to grow. It can be added to soil or used as a medium itself to grow plants.

Plants do better in organic rich soil because the organic matter serves as food for bacteria and fungi which serves as food for earthworms which serves as food for beetles and ants and so on. Decomposition is an aerobic process which means the organisms need oxygen. If the compost pile is wet, decomposition will not happen as quickly. If the pile is very wet, the process will go to an anaerobic state (lack of oxygen) which will kill the good bacteria thus killing the good fungi's food source. If that happens, the compost will have a bad smell. Thus the compost should be moist, but not wet. Good bacteria protect roots because plants send down sugar which is simple carbon made through photosynthesis to their roots. The bacteria eat the carbon. The good fungi eat the bacteria but not the roots. The fungi also secrete a "glue" which glues grains of soil together as a cluster. As the clusters get bigger and bigger, they form aggregates in the soil. Aggregates in the soil do not break up so easily when it rains and the soil does not wash away as readily resulting in less runoff. Earthworms eat the fungi and aerate the soil by burrowing through the soil creating tunnels of air. Beetles and ants and other beneficial insects eat the earthworms and so on.

Compost should be a dark brown color (not black) and have an earthy smell. Actinomycetes are a type of bacteria that creates that earthy smell of healthy soil. Many antibiotics are produced by actinomycetes. Compost is created by combining organic waste ("greens") such as green leaves or banana peels with carbon-rich materials ("browns") such as cardboard, coffee filters, dry leaves and untreated wood chips through a curing process. To start a compost pile in your backyard, start with soil and then add equal amounts of "greens" and "browns" alternating the layers. "Greens" are sources of nitrogen and protein which attract bacteria and fungi to break down the material. Greens cause the pile to heat up. Browns keep the pile from smelling bad. A compost bin can be used to turn and mix the material more easily. The material may breakdown into compost as soon as 3-12 months and be used as a natural fertilizer for plants. Things that you can compost are:



You can see the alternating layers of browns and greens.

### **A. Browns add Carbon**

Dryer Lint  
Dry Leaves  
Cat Litter (unused)  
Newspaper/paper  
Nut shells/peanut hulls  
Sawdust  
Pine needles/twigs

### **B. Greens add Nitrogen**

Apple cores  
Coffee grounds  
Hay  
Green Grass Clippings  
Fruit peels (except limes)  
Flowers  
Vegetable peels

### **C. Do NOT Compost**

Colored paper  
Dog/Cat waste  
Toxic materials  
Lime  
Meat/fat/oils/grease/bones  
Charcoal  
Non-biodegradable items.

Just things to note: crush or cut up fruit peels, cardboard, etc to help pile break down into compost quicker. Animal waste may contain disease organisms. Lime can cause acidity which can kill composting action. Meat and bones attract pests and animals. Charcoal may contain materials toxic to plants. Oils and greases coat materials not allowing them to break down thus preserving them.

Interested in learning more about composting? Check out the Composter Workshop on Wednesday April 29th, 2015 at the Eastern Shore Agricultural Research & Extension Center. See ad on page 3!



## 2-\$500 Fletcher/Beasley Scholarships Available

Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District announces the 2015 Fletcher/Beasley Scholarship.

For a Graduating Senior, an Undergraduate or Graduate College

Student pursuing a curriculum related to  
**Conservation, Environmental Studies or Agriculture.**

### For an application

Contact your School Guidance Office or the

**Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District**

<http://www.esswcd.org/Scholarships.html>

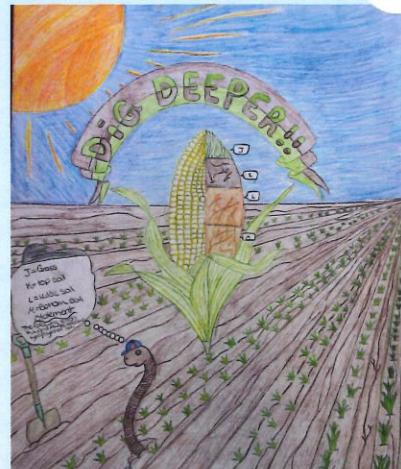
22545 Center Parkway Accomac, VA 23301

Ph (757) 787-0918 x129, Fax (757) 787-3769

[bonnie.mahl@esswcd.org](mailto:bonnie.mahl@esswcd.org)

**Deadline: April 15, 2015**

## Eastern Shore State Winners



Poster by Quintara Lyons of Northampton High School

Eastern Shore students entered their posters into the 2014 Conservation Poster contest. Of the 303 entries, 5 were chosen as first place winners in categories of K-1, 2-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12. These five first place winners were sent to the Virginia State Poster Contest. At the State level Quintara Lyons of Northampton High School was awarded 1st place in the 7th-9th grade category and Diana Rueda-Arzate of Northampton High School was awarded 1st place in the 10-12th grade category. Congratulations Quintara and Diana for a job well done!

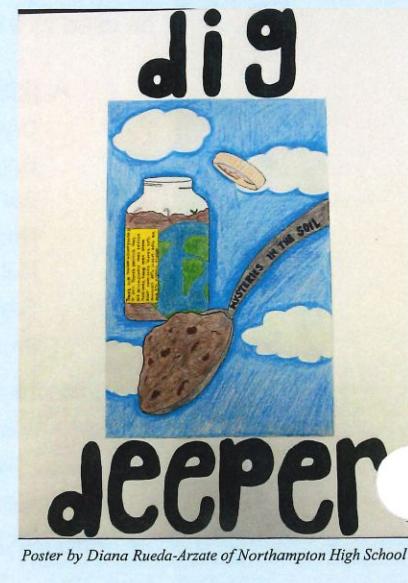
## Conservation Poster Contest

The ESSWCD Conservation Poster Contest is open to all local students, grades K-12. **Cash prizes** will be given for 1st-4th place in each of the five grade categories: K-1, 2-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12 – Top Prize: \$50 in each category. This year's theme is Pollinators and posters must have the title: "Local Heroes: Your Hard-working Pollinators" somewhere in the drawing. Posters must be submitted to ESSWCD by Friday, April 3, 2015 with a 2015 Conservation Poster Contest Entry Form attached to the back.

Poster awards will be given during the ES Science Fair held on Saturday, April 25, 2015 at the Eastern Shore Community College. For entry forms and complete rules and tips on how to make an effective poster, contact your art teacher or Bonnie Mahl at [bonnie.mahl@esswcd.org](mailto:bonnie.mahl@esswcd.org) or 757-787-0918 x129.

## Youth Conservation Camp

The Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts is sponsoring a week-long summer Conservation Camp, July 12-18, 2015 on the Virginia Tech Campus in Blacksburg, VA. The Camp is for current high school students in grades 9-12. The Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District and Ye Accawmacke Garden Club are offering **two scholarships** to send two Eastern Shore High School Students to the Youth Conservation Camp. During the week long camp, campers will learn about conservation and the environment through hands-on experiences. There will be hikes, swimming, canoeing, tours of Virginia Campus and Science Centers and other outdoor fun! If hiking to the Cascades Waterfall, Tree ID, and bug ID sound like something you would enjoy, then this camp is for you! If you know a student who has a keen interest in nature, please encourage them to apply to the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District by April 15, 2015. To see pictures from last year's camp and an application please visit the Eastern Shore SWCD webpage <http://www.esswcd.org/Camp.html> or contact Bonnie Mahl at (757)787-0918 x129 or [bonnie.mahl@esswcd.org](mailto:bonnie.mahl@esswcd.org).



Poster by Diana Rueda-Arzate of Northampton High School

# Small Farmer Workshop Series

# Composting

## Wednesday, April 29, 2015

8:30 am—4 pm; registration begins at 8

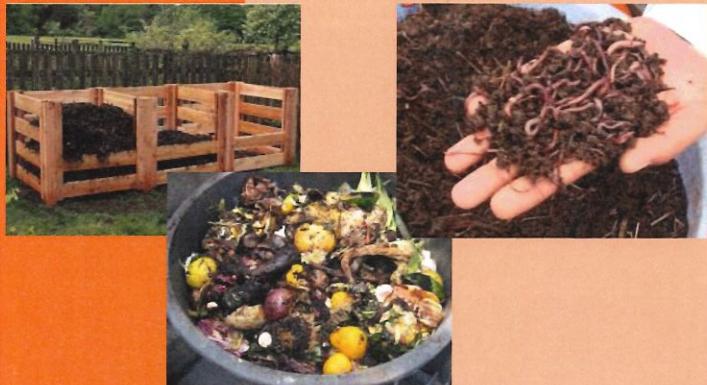
*Please join us for a FREE all-day workshop geared towards non-traditional and small-operation producers*

### Topics Include:

- Technologies & Methodologies
- Soil & Water Quality Benefits
- Sources
- Economics
- Demonstrations
- Farmer Perspectives

Exhibitors

Lunch Provided



### Location:

Eastern Shore Agricultural  
Research & Extension Center  
33446 Research Drive  
Painter, Virginia

### To Sign Up, Please Contact:

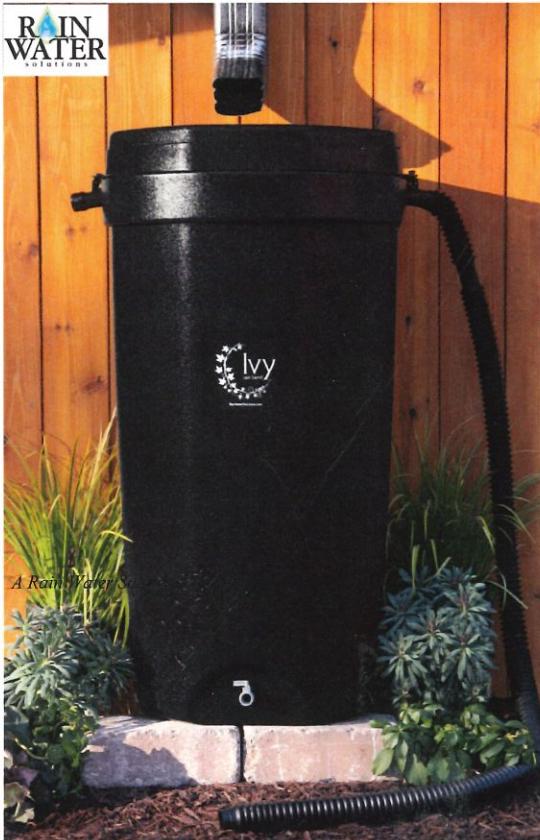
Ursula Deitch,  
Northampton County Extension  
(757) 678-7946 x25  
utankard@vt.edu

### Partners and Sponsors





## Two Rainbarrel Workshops Flowing Your Way



The Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District in partnership with the Eastern Shore Watersheds Roundtable The Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Mike's Rain Barrels invite you upcoming rain barrel workshops: Sunday, April 26, 2015 after the New Roots Blessing of the Worm Ceremony at the New Roots Garden on the corner of Fig ST and Randolph AVE (by Rayfields), in Cape Charles at 3:00pm and Saturday, May 9, 2015 at the Chincoteague Mother Earth Day Festival at the Robert Reed Waterfront Park in Chincoteague at 2:00pm.

Rain Barrels are a good best management practice that homeowners can install at their house to help with water quality. The collection of rain water into rain barrels helps prevent storm water runoff and erosion. Some people prefer to use this water on their cars and plants because it is "soft" water, water that does not contain minerals or chemicals such as chlorine, calcium or fluorine. Plants respond best to this water and it is less harsh on your vehicle's paint.

Workshop participants will leave with their own 50-gallon rain barrel like the one seen in the picture on the left. These barrels are designed to last in the sun, prevent algae growth and have a screen on top to keep mosquitoes and other wildlife out of your rain barrel.

The cost of a rain barrel is \$35/barrel. Funding for this workshop comes a grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. For questions or to register please contact Bonnie Mahl at 757-787-0918 x129 or bon-

The Shore Conserver is published quarterly by the Eastern Shore SWCD to provide information to land users. The District customarily meets monthly on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00pm at the USDA Service Center in Accomac, VA. The public is welcome to attend. To be added to the mailing list, please contact the District office at 757-787-0918 x119.

All programs and services of the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.

Change Service Requested

Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District  
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