

Composting With Recycled Materials

by

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The formula for all composting is Carbon (brown) + Nitrogen (green) + H₂O (water) + Time = Compost. The most frequent question around composting is what you can and cannot use. The good news is that there are many things that can go into compost. Composting is a great way to recycle and avoid adding more materials to your local landfill, or using excess water to run your garbage disposer. Here is a guideline to compost materials found commonly in and around the house. You will see that most of these are things that are often thrown away! Use them in your compost bin, tumbler or pile and both your plants and the Earth will thank you!

Recycled "Green" materials:

- ✓ Grass clippings
- ✓ Kitchen scraps - fruit or vegetable matter, such as peelings, cores, seeds, rinds, overripe items, used tea bags, coffee grounds and paper filters, crushed eggshells. An easy and inexpensive way to keep your scraps is in a plastic bag in your freezer. You can add to it anytime and it also produces needed moisture for the pile as it thaws!
- ✓ Non-woody plant trimmings from undiseased house or garden plants (includes leaves, soft stems and flowers)
- ✓ Dead or wilted cut flowers
- ✓ Soil from container plants
- ✓ Droppings and litter/nesting materials ONLY from healthy, vegetable-eating pets (rabbits, hamsters, parrots and parakeets, aquarium fish) or animals (chickens, cows, pigs, sheep, goats, horses) Human and pet hair

Recycled "Brown" materials:

- ✓ Tree leaves (shredded or chopped are best, but even larger ones will eventually decompose)
- ✓ Pine needles and small cones (large ones are too woody to decompose well)
- ✓ Newspapers, unwaxed cardboard and junk mail (many are now printed with vegetable dyes-just shred or tear them up into strips or pieces about 2"x2" or smaller)
- ✓ Dryer lint
- ✓ Sawdust and wood shavings
- ✓ Fireplace ashes from burned wood (don't use a lot of these, though)

Recycled "Moisture" materials

- ✓ Water from dehumidifier
- ✓ Aquarium water
- ✓ Water from vases of cut flowers
- ✓ Leftover coffee, tea, fruit and vegetable juices (freeze if you don't want to use in the compost immediately)

"DON'T USE" materials:

- x NO Meat, poultry or fish scraps or bones
- x NO Dairy products (except ground eggshells)
- x NO Fats or oils
- x NO Diseased or insect-infested plant trimmings
- x NO BBQ grill ashes
- x NO Droppings or litter from meat-eating animals (dogs and cats)

Tips for successful compost:

Have a good mix of green and brown – at least 2-4 times as much brown

Keep a nice moisture level – too wet will cause odor and compaction and too dry will inhibit decomposition

Although layering is good for a mix, too much of one thing in a layer will cause compaction and slow decomposition

For free advice on your gardening problems, contact Fairfax County Master Gardeners:

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