

Composting Ingredients

A

Alfalfa hay

Nitrogen (13:1). Compost in pile.

Algae

Nitrogen. Provides a good source of trace elements.

Animal Products

Recommended that you do not compost. See Food Wastes.

Apples, apples peels, leaves

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes for reasons we recommend that you not compost foods in backyard piles. If you decide to compost apples, they will decompose faster if you put them in a bag and slam them against concrete first to bruise them. A bruised apple attracts decomposers faster.

Aquatic weeds

Nitrogen. Compost in compost bin.

Ash

Neither Carbon nor Nitrogen. Compost wood ash only in thin layers or add to finished compost. Some texts say not to use ash at all. Others say to use it as long as no chemicals were used on the materials, which were burned. Wood ash will increase the alkalinity and salinity of the soil, and should only be used if a soil test indicates acidic soil, which needs additional potassium to be balanced. Do not use ash from charcoal. It may contain substances that harm plants.

B

Banana Peels

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Bamboo

Green bamboo leaves and stems are nitrogens when green but, like grass, become carbons as they age. Bamboo stems will also harden as they age and should be split before composting.

Bark

Carbon(100:1). Compost in backyard pile, but will compost slowly. Good for bulking material on bottom of bin to help aerate pile.

Bat guano

Nitrogen. Compost in backyard pile.

Beer, brewery waste

Nitrogen. Compost in backyard compost pile. Beer goes stale after a certain period of time, about 60 days. If you have a source of spent beer nearby, use it to water your piles.

Black Walnuts

Not recommended for composting. Some compounds can be toxic to plants.

Blood meal, dried bone

Nitrogen (4:1). Compost in backyard compost pile. Bury in center of pile or at least cover with a thick layer of carbons to avoid flies and other pests.

Bones

See Meat and Meat Bones.

Bracken (ferns)

Young green bracken is among the "nitrogens", but when the fronds die in autumn most of their nitrogen has been withdrawn so, at that point, they would be a carbon. Their stems are a bit woody, so they may not compost as fast. Be prepared to pick or filter the stems out of finished compost and put them back into the bin.

Butter

See Dairy Products.

C**Cabbage**

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Waste.

Cardboard

Carbon (200-500:1). In some areas, soiled cardboard is not acceptable for municipal recycling. Cardboard can be composted, but should be torn up or shredded first. It contains high amounts of carbon, so you may want to compost it in your slow-compost bin. You can soak either corrugated or paper cardboard in water, then shred and put into your worm bin as bedding. Cardboard can also be used under a layer of mulch which is several inches thick, or wood chip paths if there are no plants currently growing that you want to keep. When preparing a new bed, this is a good way to get rid of a lot of weeds. The cardboard or paper will keep out the light, so the weeds will not survive.

Carrots

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Cat feces

Do NOT use in compost piles.

Celery

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Cheese

See Dairy Products.

Chicken

See Meat and Meat Bones.

Clover

Nitrogen. Compost in backyard compost pile.

Coffee grounds

Nitrogen (20:1). Compost in the worm bin or pile. Note that coffee grounds are about the same ratio as grass, which may be helpful in the fall if you have more carbons than nitrogen.

Coffee filters

Carbon (170:1). Compost with coffee grinds in the worm bin. If shredded, can also go in piles.

Color newspaper inserts

Do not compost unless you know that the dyes are vegetable dyes. Inks can contain lead.

Cornstalks

Carbon (60:1). Compost in backyard compost pile. Can also compost cobs, but slowly.

D**Dairy products**

Do not compost. Most of these items will eventually decompose. We do not recommend that you compost them in your backyard compost pile because they are likely to create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies.

Diseased plants

Don't compost. Send to municipal composting site. Large composting sites usually reach a higher temperature than home piles, and the heat will kill the disease.

Dog feces

Do NOT use in compost piles.

E**Egg Shells**

No effect on carbon /nitrogen ratio. Crumble and compost in worm bin or pile. See Food Wastes.

Evergreen leaves

High in carbon. Although some texts say not to compost these, they are actually compost able materials. They might be better used as mulch because these decompose slowly. To include in regular compost pile, shred thoroughly and include with a high amount of nitrogen items.

F**Fat**

Do not compost.

Feathers

Nitrogen. Compost in piles. Shred or put in slow composting bin. Most nitrogen materials are put into a compost pile to speed up decomposition. Feather will not have this affect.

Feces

Do NOT put human feces in a compost pile.

Fish

Do not compost. These items will eventually decompose. We do not recommend that you compost them in your backyard compost pile because they are likely to create an odor problem and attract pests such as rodents and flies.

Flowers

Nitrogen. Compost in your backyard compost pile. Purchased cut flowers have probably been heavily sprayed with chemicals to reduce bugs. Don't compost purchased cut flowers, or at least wash them first.

Food Wastes

Nitrogen (12-15:1). Compost in worm bins or soil incorporation methods. We do not recommend that you compost them in your backyard compost pile because they are likely to create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies. Do NOT compost meat or dairy products, oils or mayonnaise. These products are organic, but they are not vegetative and are difficult to compost at home without creating problems.

G**Grain chaff and hulls**

Carbon (80:1) Compost in pile.

Grapefruit

Nitrogen. Compost in soil ingestor. Also, may compost in worm bin, but don't overload the bin with citrus peels.

Grass clippings

Nitrogen (when fresh). (12-19:1) is average ratio. If the lawn was not well watered or has turned brown, there will be far less nitrogen than that freshly cut from a green, healthy lawn. Compost in backyard pile if artificial pesticides and fertilizers have not been used

Grease

Do not compost.

H**Hair**

Nitrogen. Compost in pile, but only as small percentage of the pile. Dog and cat hair compost faster than human hair. Put in thin layers and cut up as much as possible. Mix thoroughly with other materials so that it doesn't mat.

Hay

Carbon. Compost in backyard pile. Because of the seeds present, you may want to put this in a pile where hay will be replanted. Some recommend hay for mulch.

Holly leaves

Carbon. Compost in backyard slow compost bin. Shred first if possible. Also makes a good mulch, shredding is a plus.

Houseplants

Nitrogen. Compost in backyard compost pile.

I

Insect-ridden plants

Do not compost in pile. Unless the material is located in the hot center of an active pile, the insect may survive and be transferred back to your plants with the finished compost.

Ivy

Do not compost. Behaves like invasive weed. See Weeds.

K

Kitty litter

Do not compost in pile. See Cat feces.

L

Lard

Do not compost.

Lake weed

Nitrogen. Compost in backyard pile

Laurel leaves

Carbon. Can make good mulch, shredding is a plus. Compost in slow compost pile, shred first if possible.

Lawn Trimmings

See Grass Clippings.

Leaves

Carbon (40-80:1). Evergreen Leaves are higher in carbon, so shred before composting. Compost in worm bin or compost pile. Deciduous leaves are best for composting. Leaves can also be used for mulch. Shred first.

Legume shells

Nitrogen (30:1). Legumes include peas and soybeans. Compost in pile.

Lettuce

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Lime

Neither carbon or nitrogen. It can kill composting organisms.

M

Magazines

Do not compost. Inks may contain harmful substances.

Manure

Nitrogen (20-25:1) when rotted. Higher in nitrogen when fresh. Pig (5:1). Poultry (10:1). Horse (25:1). Cow (20:1). Other farm animals (14:1). Compost in pile. Do not compost cat, dog, bird or human feces.

Mayonnaise

Do not compost.

Meat and meat bones

Do not compost. These items will eventually decompose. These items will also attract unwanted pests and create odor problems.

Milk

Do not compost. See Dairy Products.

N**Newspaper**

Carbon (200-500:1). In some areas, soiled newspaper is not acceptable for municipal recycling. Newspaper may be composted, but contains high amounts of carbon, so it may not be convenient to compost in your backyard bin. Shred and soak in water before putting in backyard pile. Shredded paper can also be put in a worm bin as bedding. Check with your newspaper companies to ensure that the inks used in the newspaper are vegetable based.

Nut Shells

Carbon. Compost in backyard compost pile. Can also used for mulch.

O**Oak leaves**

Nitrogen. Compost in backyard compost pile. Oak leaves are unusual in that most leaves are carbon. Oak leaves should be added as a nitrogen material.

Oat straw

Carbon (74:1). Compost in pile.

Oils of any kind

Do not compost.

Onion peel

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin, but not in large quantities. See Food Wastes.

Orange peel

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin, but not in large quantities. See Food Wastes.

P

Paper

Carbon (170:1). Compost best in worm bins but also may compost in piles if shredded thoroughly and mixed with other materials. Do not use paper that has colored ink (which may contain toxic substances) or that is glossy or coated. Also see Newspaper.

Pet feces

Do not compost. See Dog feces and Cat feces.

Peanut butter

Do not compost.

Pears

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Pet food

Do not compost in pile as it may attract pests.

Pine needles

Carbon. Slow to compost; do not use large quantities in compost pile.

Pineapple

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. Only compost small amounts due to the acidity.

Poisonous Plants

Do not compost.

Potatoes

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Prunings

Twigs will be carbon. Deciduous leaves will be nitrogen. Compost in backyard slow compost pile. Chop first.

Pumpkin

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

R

Rhododendron leaves

Carbon. Can make good mulch, shredding is a plus. Compost in backyard slow-compost pile.

Rose prunings

Nitrogen. Compost in backyard slow compost pile. Remove thorns for safety. Shred first if possible.

S

Salad Dressing

Contain oil. Do not compost.

Sawdust

Carbon (400-500:1). Acceptable if wood was not painted or treated with chemicals or glues. Compost only in thin layers. Use a lot of nitrogen materials.

Seaweed

Nitrogen (19:1). Compost in backyard pile or use as mulch. Provides trace elements and is said to have 60 minerals. The fresher the better. The longer it is uprooted the more salt it absorbs in the ocean. Keep moist.

Sewage sludge

Do not compost. May have high concentrations of metals, which are toxic to humans.

Sod

Large amounts of sod should not be composted. Small amounts can be composted by stacking the sod grass side down, and dirt side up. Cover with black plastic so that no air or light can reach the sod. Could take up to a year to fully decompose.

Sour Cream

Do not compost.

Squash

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Straw

Carbon (40-100:1, usually about 80:1). Compost in backyard compost pile.

String

Cotton string may be composted in a backyard pile if you have no other use for it.

Sugarcane waste

Carbon (50:1). Compost in backyard pile. Sugarcane fiber is 200:1 and may be composted in a backyard pile.

T

Teabags

Carbon (170:1). Compost with tea leaves in the worm bin. Can also go into backyard pile.

Tea leaves

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin or compost pile.

Tomatoes

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Trees

Do not compost. Especially if infested with worms or diseases.

Turnip leaves

Nitrogen. Compost in worm bin. See Food Wastes.

Twigs

Carbon. Compost in backyard slow compost pile. Chop first to speed up decomposition.

V**Vegetables**

See Food Wastes.

Vegetable oil

Do not compost. See Oils.

W**Walnuts**

Most varieties of walnuts can be composted. However see the caution about Black Walnuts.

Weeds

Do not compost weeds which have gone to seed. Composting will not kill the seeds and you'll spread weeds seed on your garden.

Wood chips

Carbon (500:1). Compost only in thin layers. Use a lot of nitrogen ingredients.

Woody wastes

Will compost over a year or two. Chop before adding to the pile, or use separate bin just for long term composting.

Y**Yard trimmings**

Compost if no chemical pesticides or fertilizers have been used. Large limbs may be put into a separate long term composting bin as they can take 1-2 years to fully decompose.

Yogurt

Do not compost. See Dairy Products.