

Compost Pile Ingredients: Yes or No

Note: The presence of a C, N, or O in the C:N column indicates whether the C:N values of the material tend to be carbonaceous (C), nitrogenous (N), or other (O).

MATERIAL	USE	C:N	COMMENTS
Algae and seaweed	YES	N	Good nutrient source.
Ash from charcoal or coal	NO		Contains sulfur dioxides, may harm plants in the garden.
Ashes from wood fireplace or stove	YES, but very alkaline material	O	Can cause nutrient imbalance problems. Use no more than a fine sprinkling every 18" or so.
Bird droppings	NO		Droppings from pet birds may contain disease organisms and weed seeds.
Cardboard	YES	C	Use if it cannot be recycled. Best if shredded into small pieces. Glue is usually organic.
Cat feces or litter	NO		May contain disease organisms. Bury 5" deep in non-crop soils away from lake, stream, or well—or put in the trash.
Coffee grounds	YES	N	Worms love it.
Compost activator and starters	YES, but not required	N	Use is optional. Millions of people make compost successfully without them.
Cornstalks, cobs	YES	C	Best if chopped up and mixed with a source of nitrogen.
Dog droppings	NO		May contain disease organisms. Bury 5" deep in non-crop soils away from lake, stream, or well—or put in the trash. May also be flushed down a toilet.
Diseased plants	NO		Piles often do not get hot enough to destroy all diseases.
Dryer lint	YES	N	May need to be moistened.
Eggshells	YES	O	Break down slowly. Recommended that shells be crushed first.
Fish scraps	NO		Attracts rodents and flies.
Hair	YES	N	Add moisture and mix thoroughly in the pile.
Lime	YES, but not necessarily	O	Use sparingly. Lime converts ammonium nitrogen into ammonia gas, creating an odor problem. Overliming can also make a pile too alkaline and kill beneficial microorganisms. It is better to add it to soil or finished compost.
Manure (horse, cow, pig, sheep, goat, chicken)	YES	N	Excellent source of nitrogen. Fresh manure has a high water content; mix with drier materials.

Compost Pile Ingredients: Yes or No (continued)

MATERIAL	USE	C:N	COMMENTS
Meat, milk, meat scraps, grease, cheese, etc.	NO		May attract rodents and other pests to backyard compost systems.
Newspaper	YES	C	Use if it cannot be recycled. Recommend shredding into small pieces. Most inks today are safe for garden use.
Oak leaves	YES	C	Recommend shredding. Very acidic and decompose slowly. The composting process will help counteract the acidity.
Pine cones and needles (redwood, eucalyptus)	YES, but use sparingly	C	Recommended shredding and adding in small quantities. Other compost pile materials will neutralize their acid effect.
Sawdust and wood shavings	YES, but may need to add extra nitrogen	C	Has a high carbon content. DO NOT USE sawdust from pressure treated wood.
Sod	YES	N	Compost separately, grass side down. Cover with black plastic to inhibit growth.
Weeds	YES, but not seeds or spreading roots	N	Annual weeds which have not gone to seed can be composted. Plants that spread through roots or runners such as morning glory, quackgrass, buttercup, or ivy should not be put into fresh compost piles. Spread these plants on pavement to dry thoroughly before adding to compost pile. Home compost piles often do not get uniformly hot enough to kill seeds.