

101 Things You Can Compost (printable)

Composting is a very simple process that nature takes to break down organic materials into a natural fertilizer for use in the home garden and yard. But one item people often ask is, what items can be composted? This will be a guide for what list of materials you can use to determine if you can add it to your compost pile or bin.



Building a Winter compost pile

If you are reading this, I assume you already have a good idea of [what compost is](#), and how to get started [making a basic compost pile](#). This article will cover the finer points of specific materials, starting from a high level as to how your temperature and other conditions can effect what should/shouldn't be composted. By the end of the article you should have a full understanding of what materials you can add to a compost pile.

If you are in a rush, then you can simply download a [printable list of items to compost](#). But I would urge you to return though and review some of the other points we make in this article as it relates to the importance of temperature and other factors to consider.

How this article is organized:

- [How temperature effects what should/shouldn't be composted](#)
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How temperature effects what should be composted

This may seem like a silly topic for a list of materials that should be composted, but it isn't. If you are expecting to make compost in 4-8 weeks, then you need a pile to get hot. High temperature accelerates the decomposition of organic material. And certain plant materials may take up to a year to decompose under cold or ambient temperatures. So, getting your pile hot is very beneficial. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)



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To make sure you get a hot pile, you will need to achieve a large volume of material. A good rule of thumb is to make your pile 3-4' diameter (1-1.3m) and it will be sufficiently large to get hot. For a more detailed explanation, read our guide on making a hot compost pile.

Plant materials that are difficult to compost

Everything will compost given enough time. But there are certain plants that have thick, tough leaves that can take a year or more to break down under regular ambient conditions. To help accelerate their decomposition, you should shred them with a lawnmower and make sure you have a hot compost pile:

- Palm fronds
- Live Oak leaves
- Holly leaves
- Southern Magnolia leaves
- [Mountain Laurel](#) leaves
- Rhododendron leaves



Palm fronds take a long time to compost! Chopping them up with a mower and using in a hot pile can speed them up.

High temperatures kill weed seeds

Another reason we need to understand what temperatures our pile will reach is because of seeds. A hot pile that reaches 120F for about 7 days, or 140F for several days will kill/sterilize any weed seeds that may be in grass trimmings or yard waste. [2] The higher temperatures weaken a seeds natural defenses at decomposition, as well as accelerate it.

If your pile or bin isn't large enough to get hot, you may not be able to kill the seeds from common yard weeds such as dandelion, sorrel, or clover. If that is the case, you should not add these materials to the compost pile. If your finished compost contains weed seeds, you may just end up spreading weed seeds all over garden or [yard](#)!

High temperatures will kill diseases on plants

An old garden adage states to never compost diseased plant material. And if your pile is 'cold' or not hot, then this can be a good policy. But a hot compost pile will kill all plant diseases via the high temperatures.

What materials should not be composted

In general, any plant material can be added to a compost pile hot or cold, and given enough time will decompose. But you should avoid using plant materials for composting if they have been treated with pesticides or herbicides. Grass clippings or yard waste that has come in contact with pesticides should not be added to a compost pile.

You may be asking yourself, I don't use herbicides on my grass, but what about the previous owner? Well, that vast majority of lawn chemicals and herbicides will break down organically, given enough time. The trick is figuring out how long that will take. Some herbicides have a half-life of a month or two, while others such as glyphosate has a half-life of 18 months to 3 years.

Each half-life will reduce the amount of herbicide present by 50%. For example, you need about 5 half-lives to reduce the original amount of herbicide by 93%. So, you need to figure out what the herbicide was, what it's half-life is, and then multiply that amount of time to reduce it. But, know that these half-lives are under certain conditions. And those conditions are probably different from your own yard. Thus, any attempt to determine this is going to be somewhat of an educated guess.

Meat, dairy, and oils should not be composted

As a general rule, you should not compost any meat, dairy, or oily cooked foods. These materials can often attract rodents or animals to your compost pile. Also, oils tend to saturate but not evaporate, and can squeeze out air leading to areas of anaerobic bacteria (cold compost bacteria that is very slow to decompose things).

Now, if you have a very large and hot pile, you can compost almost any material, even meat and cheese. The high temperatures will dissuade animals and help accelerate the breakdown. But this is easily achievable for large commercial compost facilities. It is difficult for a backyard composter to make a large enough pile to do this, and having such a large pile can also lead to risks of the compost pile catching on fire.

Furthermore, if you compost meats and the temperature is not very high, you will likely have fly larvae and maggots in your pile (personal experience!). So, in general, stick to plants.

Never compost dog or cat feces

Dog and cat feces should not be composted as they can contain parasites that can survive high temperatures of a compost pile. These parasites are harmful to humans, and if they were transferred to your vegetables you could unwittingly ingest them. So, best to dispose of the pet feces in the trash.

Be cautious with paper and cardboard products

While many sources say it's fine to compost news paper or cardboard (even cereal boxes), I would recommend you not do so. The reasoning for this is that glossy finishes and colored inks can contain heavy metals that may contaminate your garden. Now, it will take many years of heavy use to do so, but if you can spend a reasonable effort to avoid the risk, you should do so.

If you want to learn all the nitty gritty details of what can be in colored or glossy paper/cardboard products, you can [read about it here](#).

Basics of Compost, what ingredients are needed.

Four main ingredient categories are needed to make compost.

- Green materials – fresh ingredients that are rich in nitrogen
- Brown materials – dried plant or paper based products that are high in carbon
- Water – An active compost pile needs to be moist, but not wet to function and decompose properly. You need to maintain
- Air – active compost piles need oxygen to function

Water and air need no further explanation. But for people new to composting, what kind of materials should they gather can be confusing. From a high level, the most common items that are used to make a home compost pile are the following:

Common Green materials for compost	Common Brown Materials for compost
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fruit and vegetable scraps• Grass clippings• Coffee grounds• Manure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shredded cardboard• Shredded Paper• Sawdust• Autumn leaves

Source [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

The above materials are easy to accumulate for most homeowners. A good rule of thumb is your overall pile should be around 50/50 green to brown material by volume, and a total size of 3’ diameter and tall. This helps ensure your compost pile will heat up to accelerate the decomposition, assuming other best practices are followed such as maintaining proper moisture levels as well as frequent turning.



Vegetable and fruit peelings are probably the most common green material composted

But, what constitutes a green or a brown material, and if it is safe to compost is another matter. Below you will find a list of green and brown materials that you can compost, based on the household source.



Shredded cardboard / paper is the most common brown material composted

Note – you can download & print our complete [printable list of items to compost here.](#)

List of kitchen items that can be composted

Number	Kitchen Material	Green / Brown	Special instruction
1	Fruit scraps	Green	
2	Vegetable peelings	Green	
3	Stale coffee	Green	Pour it onto the pile
4	Coffee Grounds	Green	
5	Corn cobs & husks	Green	
6	Spoiled lettuce	Green	
7	Citrus rinds/peelings (orange, lemon, lime)	Green	These are fine in a compost pile, but not ok for a worm bin / vermicomposting.
8	Melon rinds	Green	
9	Pineapple	Green	
10	Squash skins / cores	Green	
11	Spoiled tofu	Green	
12	Spoiled wine	Green	
13	Spoiled juice	Green	
14	Expired canned vegetables	Green	
15	Pasta	Green	
16	Bread	Green	Torn up
17	Rice	Green	
18	Avocado skin	Green	
19	Rotten tomato sauce or paste	Green	

Number	Kitchen Material	Green / Brown	Special instruction
20	Expired spices / herbs	Green	
21	Expired granola/protein bars	Green	
22	Avocado pits	Green	Often germinates in compost piles / slow to break down
23	Peach pits	Green	Slow to break down
24	Spoiled cheese	Green	Use in moderation, deep inside pile
25	Expired jam/jelly	Green	
26	Stale beer	Green	
27	Shrimp Shells	Green	Very high nitrogen. Excellent green material.
28	Lobster shells	Green	
29	Crab shells	Green	
30	Crayfish / Crawdad shells	Green	
31	Tea leaves	Green	
32	Pizza box	Brown	Only non-greasey parts without colored ink
33	Paper towel cardboard rolls	Brown	Shredded
34	Paper towels / napkins	Brown	Shredded
35	Brown Paper bags	Brown	Shredded
36	Tooth picks	Brown	
37	Chopsticks	Brown	Only plain wooded chopsticks should be composted – no paint
38	Wooden skewers	Brown	
39	Paper plates	Brown	Only white or brown, uncoated
40	Egg cartons	Brown	Only those made from recycled paper/cardboard. Shredded
41	Egg shells (crush them up)	Brown	
42	Coffee filters	Brown	
43	Tea bags	Brown	
44	Stale chips, tortillas, pitas	Brown	
45	Stale crackers	Brown	
46	Stale cereal	Brown	
47	Stale nuts / peanuts	Brown	
48	Nut shells (walnut , hickory , pistachio, etc)	Brown	
49	Peanut shells	Brown	
50	Sunflower seed shells	Brown	
51	Popcorn kernels	Brown	Can be cooked or uncooked
52	Wine corks	Brown	Chopped up
52	Clam/muscle shells	Brown	Crushed

List of yard items that can be composted

Number	Yard Material	Green / Brown	Special instruction
53	Grass clippings	Green	Must be well mixed
54	Hedge trimmings	Green	
55	Fresh leaves	Green	Torn or cut up
56	Weeds	Green	Safe if you have a hot pile. If not, remove seed heads.
57	Seaweed	Green	Torn or cut up
58	Excess fertilizer	Green	Nitrogen rich fertilizer (no pesticides/herbicides)
59	Houseplant trimmings	Green	
60	Cut flower arrangements	Green	
61	Urine	Green	Urine is rich in nitrogen. It is an excellent green material.
62	Pumpkins / Jack-O-Lanterns	Green	Gather these in November to make a hot Winter compost pile
63	Used potting soil	Brown	
64	Flowerbed or garden fall clean up stalks	Brown	
65	Dead flower stalks	Brown	
66	Tree bark	Brown	
67	Twigs	Brown	
68	Autumn leaves	Brown	
69	Dust from sweeping floor or dust bunnies	Brown	
70	Dead houseplants	Brown	

List of general household items for composting

Number	Household Items	Green / Brown	Special instruction
71	Brown packing paper (kraft paper)	Brown	Shredded
72	Shredded cardboard	Brown	Torn or shredded
73	Shredded paper	Brown	No colored paper or inks
74	Toilet paper rolls	Brown	Used or clean, both can be composted
75	Kleenex / tissues	Brown	null
76	Envelopes / junk mail	Brown	Non-glossy white paper plain or with black ink only
77	Straw	Brown	People often discard after Autumn
78	Sawdust	Brown	From untreated, plain air-dried or kiln dried wood
79	Hair from brushes	Brown	null
80	Hair clippings / beard trimmings	Brown	null
81	Finger nail clippings	Brown	null
82	Lint from natural fabrics	Brown	null
83	Cotton balls	Brown	100% Cotton only
84	White cotton clothes	Brown	100% Cotton only
85	Wool clothes	Brown	100% Wool only, shredded

Number	Household Items	Green / Brown	Special instruction
86	White cotton sheets	Brown	100% Cotton only

List of pet items that can be composted

Number	Pet materials	Green / Brown	Special instruction
87	Cow manure	Green	
88	Goat manure	Green	
89	Horse Manure	Green	Need to hot compost, as it can contain weed seeds
90	Rabbit Manure	Green	
91	Guinea pig manure	Green	
92	Manure from herbivores	Green	
93	Deer manure	Green	Often can be found in yard
94	Chicken manure	Green	Warning – must reach 140F for 7 days or sit for a year before use! Salmonella / Pathogen risk
95	Old pet food	Green	
96	Feathers	Brown	
97	Pet hair	Brown	
98	Spoiled pet food	Brown	
99	Wood shavings from horse bedding	Brown	
100	Chicken bedding	Brown	
101	Rabbit/Guinea Pig bedding	Brown	

Final thoughts

Composting is really a way of life. Once you realize how many different things found around your house can be composted, you will start doing so, and feel great about it. You will be amazed at just how much landfill space could be saved if more people composted at home.