

Composting - Bare Bones

What to Compost:

Material	C / N	Info
leaves	Carbon	leaves break down faster when shredded
shrub prunings	Carbon	woody prunings are slow to break down
straw or hay	Carbon	straw is best; hay (with seeds) is less ideal
pine needles	Carbon	acidic; use in moderate amounts
wood ash	Carbon	only use ash from clean materials; sprinkle lightly
newspaper & shredded paper	Carbon	avoid using glossy paper and colored inks
cardboard	Carbon	shred material to avoid matting
corn cobs, stalks	Carbon	slow to decompose; best if chopped up
dryer lint	Carbon	best if from natural fibers
sawdust / wood chips / pellets	Carbon	high carbon levels; add in layers to avoid clumping
table scraps	Nitrogen	add with dry carbon items
fruit & vegetable scraps	Nitrogen	add with dry carbon items
coffee grounds	Nitrogen	filters may also be included
tea leaves	Nitrogen	loose or in bags
flowers, cuttings	Nitrogen	chop up any long woody stems
grass clippings	Nitrogen	add in thin layers so they don't mat into clumps
lawn & garden weeds	Nitrogen	only use weeds which have not gone to seed
green comfrey leaves	Nitrogen	excellent compost 'activator'
chicken manure	Nitrogen	excellent compost 'activator'

Carbon/Nitrogen Ratio:

All compostable materials are either carbon or nitrogen-based, to varying degrees. The secret to a healthy compost pile is to maintain a working balance between these two elements and have much more carbon than nitrogen. A simple rule of thumb is to use one-third green and two-thirds brown materials.

- Carbon - carbon-rich matter, like branches, stems, dried leaves, peels, bits of wood, bark dust or sawdust pellets, shredded brown paper bags, corn stalks, coffee filters, conifer needles, straw, peat moss, wood ash gives compost its light, fluffy body.
- Nitrogen - nitrogen or protein-rich matter like manures, food scraps, green lawn clippings and green leaves provides raw materials for making enzymes.

The bulkiness of the brown materials allows oxygen to penetrate and nourish the organisms that reside there. Too much nitrogen makes for a dense, smelly, slowly decomposing anaerobic mass. Good composting hygiene means covering fresh nitrogen-rich material, which can release odors if exposed to open air, with carbon-rich material, which often exudes a fresh, wonderful smell. If in doubt, add more carbon!