omposing MADE EASY

JESSICA QUINN

Composting Made Easy by Jessica Quinn www.mamaonthehomestead.com

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oneng What is Compost? **Benefits of Homemade Compost** Carbon vs. Nitrogen **Optimal Compost Ratio Compostable Items Avoid Composting These Items Common Compost Methods** Set Up Your Compost Bin The Garden Compost Guide Cheat Sheet Resources

Hil I'm Jess!

I am a single mother of 5 homesteading on a 1/2 acre lot. I have been homesteading on different levels since 2014 and I've learned so much along the way. Sharing my experiences and knowledge is my way of helping you find success sooner rather than later.

This compost guide will help you to build a strong ど healthy compost to use on your garden next year.

Shoveling scoops of dark, rich, living organic matter that *you made* is incredibly satisfying and it will increase your level of sustainability.

Let's get into it!



Jessica Quinn





Compost is the product of the decomposition of organic matter.

Organic matter such as leaves and food scraps can be decomposed in a natural process to form nutrient-rich soil that is an ideal amendment for garden soil.

Quality compost will host earthworms and beneficial microorganisms that help to break down the materials and add more nutrients into the compost.

WHAT IS COMPOST



Making your own compost has a great set of benefits.

INCREASES SUSTAINABILITY



When you make your own compost, you cut out your reliance on companies that typically supply your compost. Instead of purchasing compost from Lowes or a local lawn & garden store, you just go to your backyard. This saves money and puts you one step closer to sustainability.

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REDUCES WASTE

Food and paper products that would typically be tossed in the trash can be turned into a nutrient-rich soil amendment. This gives the "waste" a second-life instead of allowing it to rot away in a landfill.

IMPROVES SOIL



Using homemade compost on your garden will introduce microorganisms and nutrient-dense organic matter to the soil. This will improve soil structure, health, and fertility as well as water retention and the reduction of pests & diseases.

Carbon vs. Mitrogen

Compost needs a mix of carbon and nitrogen

materials to be the most beneficial to your garden.

Carbon

- Carbon materials are also known as brown materials.
- This includes carbon-rich items such as paper products, wood chips, and dried leaves.
- Carbon acts as an energy source for the microorganisms within your compost pile.
- In general, carbon materials break down more quickly than nitrogen-rich materials so they need to be added more often.
- Too much carbon can slow down the decomposition process.

Nitrogen

- Nitrogen materials are also known as green materials.
- This includes nitrogen-rich items such as fruit & veggie scraps, cow manure, grass clippings, etc.
- Nitrogen is essential for cell growth in the microorganisms that live within your compost.
- If there is too much nitrogen in the compost mix, the excess will be lost in the form of ammonia.

If you would like to go more in-depth on the roles of carbon & nitrogen in compost, check out <u>this article.</u>



A 30:1 carbon-to-nitrogen ratio is ideal.

This means that you need 30 times as much brown material as green.

Fill the bottom of the compost bin with small branches, sticks, dried leaves, cardboard, and paper materials. This will give your compost a strong carbon base.

Then you can add the green materials- kitchen scraps, grass clippings, coffee & tea, etc.

Thankfully, knowing the exact ratio isn't necessary for backyard and small homestead composters. Studies have shown that quality compost can be produced with varying ratios. Just make sure that you are adding more carbon than nitrogen and that you pay attention to the speed of decomposition.



Items that can be composted are broken down into two categories, *green and brown materials.*

Green materials are higher in nitrogen than carbon. *Brown materials* have a higher carbon content.

This list will give you a good idea of what you can compost and it will help you to determine how much of each to add (more browns than greens).

Green Materials

- Grass Clippings
- Fruit & Veggie Scraps
- Tea (loose-leaf)
- Coffee grounds
- Eggshells
- Natural Fabric
- Cow Manure
- Rabbit Droppings
- Chicken Litter

Brown Materials

- Dry Leaves
- Stalks, Sticks, and Branches
- Cardboard/Paper Towel Tubes
- Paper (non-coated)
- Untreated wood chips
- Pela Phone Cases
- Mulch/Straw

Green Materials

Grass Clippings

Mix fresh grass clippings in with your compost pile Don't leave the grass all together or it may form a mat that will delay or stop the decomposition process and make a smelly mess for you.

Fruit & Veggie Scraps

You can toss whole fruits & veggies into the compost or you can cut them into pieces to speed up decomposition. Avoid citrus fruits.

Tea & Coffee

Tea leaves and coffee grounds can be a great addition to compost. But, be sure to toss the tea bag if it is made from synthetic materials.

Eggshells

Eggshells add calcium into your compost. This calcium can regulate the soil pH and help to prevent blossom end rot. Crush or powder your eggshells to make decomposition a little faster.

Natural Fabric

Compost natural fabrics like cotton, silk, wool, hemp, and linen. Synthetic materials cannot be composted.

Cow Manure

Cow manure is a great composting material. It will need to be hot composted to be safe to add to the garden. Cover the pile when the forecast calls for heavy rain to help keep the temperature up. (130–150 degrees F is ideal).

Rabbit Droppings

Rabbit manure is an excellent fertilizer. It can actually be added directly to the garden without composting because it is "cold" manure. You can toss rabbit droppings straight into the compost pile with some brown materials like straw.

Chicken Litter

Chicken manure is "hot" manure meaning that it is high in ammonia so it must be composted before being added to the garden. 130–150 degrees F is the ideal temperature for safe chicken litter compost.

Brown Materials

Dry Leaves

Leaves can form a mat in your compost pile so try to mix them in with other materials. It is a good idea to chop or shred leaves before adding them to the compost as well.

Stalks, Sticks, Branches

Woody sticks, branches, and stalks can be composted, but they could potentially take years to break down. Try to break them up (or even use a wood chipper) to speed up the process.

Cardboard & Paper

Breakdown or shred cardboard/paper and mix it with green materials to avoid creating a mat that water and air cannot penetrate. Avoid using cardboard or paper that has a shiny coating.

Woodchips, Mulch, Straw

These materials are great carbon sources that can increase the airflow throughout the compost pile. Be sure to avoid treated wood.

<u>Pela Phone Cases</u>

Yep! You read that correctly... these phone cases can be composted! <u>Pela cases</u> are made of compostable Flaxstic[®] (bioplastic and flax straw) that is free of lead, cadmium, BPA and phthalates.



COMPOSTABLE ITEMS- BROWN

Avoid Composting These

It's true that most organic items can be composted... but not all. There are several materials that should be avoided in a garden compost pile.

Items to avoid composting:

- Human and Pet Waste
- Weeds
- Grass that has gone to seed
- Diseased Plants
- Meat & Fish
- Dairy
- ・ Fats & Oils
- Treated Wood
- Coated Paper/Cardboard
- Charcoal
- Citrus
- Onions

Avoid Composting ...

Human Waste, Pet Waste

Waste from omnivores and carnivores (like dogs, cats, and humans) should be avoided because of parasites and pathogens that can be present.

Weeds, Grass Gone to Seed, and Diseased Plants

If you toss these in your compost pile and then onto your garden, you may end up with a big weed and/or disease issue.

Fresh grass clippings can be used as long as the grass was cut before going to seed.

Meat, Fish, Dairy, Fats & Oils

These items tend to smell pretty strong as they decompose. This smell can attract critters that you don't want hanging around. There are also bacteria 운 pathogens in these items that may not be killed during the composting process.

Treated or Painted Wood

Treated, painted, and stained woods can leach chemicals into your compost and your garden. Only compost wood that has not been chemically treated.

Coated Paper or Cardboard

Coated paper and cardboard contain plastics, dyes, and/or paints that can make your compost take longer to break down and potentially leak chemicals into the garden.

Charcoal Ash & Briquettes

Many charcoal briquettes contain additives that you would not want to use on your garden. Avoid using charcoal that was sprayed with lighter fluid.

Citrus & Onions

I recommend not composting citrus fruits and onions because they can ward off beneficial insects, worms, and other microorganisms because of their high acidity. However, they CAN be composted if you add them in small amounts and bury the onions to mitigate smell.



There are several different composting methods. Some are labor intensive and some are very low maintenance. Some of these methods overlap, but we will cover them separately.

Common Composting Methods

- Hot Composting
- Cold Composting
- No-Turn Composting
- In-Ground Composting
- Covered-Composting
- Open-Air Composting
- Tumble Composting
- Vermicomposting
- Single Bin Composting
- Multi-Bin Composting

Common Compost Wethods

Hot Composting

Hot composting is an aerobic process that requires frequent turning to provide oxygen to the microorganisms that need it. This process heats up the materials which helps them to decompose quickly.

Cold Composting

Cold composting is an anaerobic process that does not require turning. This process uses microorganisms that do not require oxygen to cause a slow ferment of the compost materials. This method takes longer, but it is low-maintenance.

No-Turn Composting

There are a few different no-turn methods. We will talk more about each of these methods. No-Turn is a very low-maintenance approach, but it will take longer to see a finished product.

- You could use an open aerated pile of materials that has bulky items throughout to allow airflow.
- You could have an aerated pile in a container where you add new materials to the top without turning. This is called continuous composting.
- You could dig a hole and keep your compost pile in the ground.

Open-Air Composting

This is simply the method of composting without a cover. This can be done with or without a container and with or without turning. Created an aerated pile by adding bulky materials throughout that will allow air to flow through.

Covered Composting

Covered composting is just that, a compost pile with a cover. Covering your compost is not necessary, but some people choose to cover when there will be excessive rain, to keep animals away, or to warm the pile in the winter. A tumbler would also be considered a covered composter.

Continuous Composting

Continuous Composting is a method in which you continue to add new compost to the top of your pile. The most decomposed matter will be at the bottom which new & fresh materials at the top.

Batch Composting

Instead of continually adding materials to a compost pile, you can save all of your materials and add them in one big batch. This works best in a tumbler, but it can be done in a pile with lots of turning.

In-Ground Composting

This method is pretty neat. You dig a trench in the soil, add your compost materials, cover them with soil, wait, and then plant directly on top.

Vermicomposting

Vermicomposting is the composting method in which you add worms to the compost mix. In this method, you wouldn't wait for worms to naturally show up, you would add them in yourself. Creating a vermicompost system can give you rich compost fairly quickly. <u>Get</u> <u>composting worms here.</u>

Single-bin Composting

Using one bin to compost is a simple system. You use one bin where all of your compost materials are added and choose to either turn frequently or not turn at all (continuous composting). When the compost is finished, it goes from this bin straight to the garden.

Multi-Bin Composting

This method uses 2–3 bins that will hold the compost in varying levels of decomposition. The compost will be moved from one bin to the next until it reaches the final stages of decomposition.



There are many different ways to set up a composting system. Click through these ideas to see tutorials for each one.



Types of Compost Bins

- Pallet Compost Bin
- <u>Bucket Compost Bin</u>
- <u>Open Air Pile</u>
- <u>DIY Barrel Compost Bin</u>
- <u>Compost Tumbler</u>
- <u>Vermicompost Bucket System</u>
- <u>Storage Bins for Vermicomposting</u>

SET UP YOUR COMPOST BIN



GARDEN COMPOST GUIDE

To Compost

Brown Materials

carbon

- Cardboard
- Brown Leaves
- Mulch/Straw
- Newspapers • Dried Grass
- Brown Paper Bags
- Pela Phone Cases
- Clippings

Green Materials

nitrogen

- Fruit & Veggie Scraps Egg Shells
- Spent Coffee Grounds Tea Leaves
- Fresh Grass Clippings Cow Manure
- Organic Fabric

Aim for a 30:1 carbon:nitrogen ratio in your compost.

Mot To Compost

- Charcoal
- Diseased Plants
- Pet Waste
- Fats & Oils
- Weeds with seed heads
- Large amount of citrus

- Meat/Seafood
- Onions
- Dairy
- Plastic-lined paper products
- Manure from omni/carnivores

If you do compost citrus or onions, throw in crushed egg shells to help balance the pH.

Resonaces

- <u>Pela Cases</u>
- <u>Uncle Jim's Worm Farm</u>
- How to Compost for Beginners
- <u>How to Make a Pallet Compost Bin</u>
- <u>How to Build a Bucket Compost Bin</u>
- <u>More Vermicomposting Information</u>
- <u>The Essential Role of the Carbon Nitrogen</u> <u>Ratio in Composting</u>