

WHAT TO PUT IN

Anything growing in the yard is potential food for the tiny, microbial decomposers that make compost. They decompose organic yard “wastes” with little-to-no help from us. The only issue we have with them is time; we humans are often impatient but microbes have nothing but time.

THE MIX IS IMPORTANT

The decomposers do a faster job of composting when you select the correct proportion of materials to compost. All organic materials contain carbon and nitrogen. The decomposers use carbon for energy and nitrogen to build protein. The relationship of these elements is called the carbon to nitrogen or **C:N Ratio**. A combination of materials with a C:N ratio of 30:1 creates the *ideal* diet for compost microbes. A hot, fast pile can produce usable compost in as little as 4-6 weeks.

A STANDARD COMPOST PILE MIGHT BE:

- 1 part brown/carbon dry leaves [60:1]
- 2 parts green/Nitrogen grass clippings [20:1]

Calculating the C:N ratio, tells us the ratio of this pile is 33:1 or very close to ideal.

HERE’S THE MATH:

$$60/1 + 20/1 + 20/1 = 100/3 \text{ or } 33:1.$$

Other ingredients can be used to build a hot pile but the proportions are likely to be different. For example, calculate 1 bag of pine needles, 1 bag of dry leaves, and 3 bags of grass:

$$110/1 + 60/1 + 20/1 + 20/1 + 20/1 = 230/5 \text{ or } 46/1$$

The C:N ratio is higher than ideal, so the decomposition rate may be slower.

C:N RATIOS OF COMMON ORGANIC WASTES

“Browns” [good sources of CARBON]	
Hay [Dry].....	40:1
Leaves [Fresh].....	40:1
Horse Manure w/bedding.....	45:1
Straw, Wheat.....	50:1
Leaves [Dry].....	60:1
Corn Stalks [Fresh].....	60:1
Peat Moss.....	60:1
Weeds [Dry].....	90:1
Straw, Cornstalk.....	100:1
Pine Needles.....	110:1
Bark.....	120:1
Office Paper.....	130:1
Paper [Newspaper].....	175:1
Sawdust [weathered 2 months].....	300:1
Cardboard [Corrugated].....	400:1
Sawdust [Fresh].....	500:1
Wood Chips.....	700:1
“Greens” [good sources of NITROGEN]	
Poultry Manure [Fresh].....	10:1
Poultry Manure w/bedding.....	15:1
Cow Manure [Fresh].....	15:1
Sheep Manure.....	15:1
Vegetable Trimmings.....	15:1
Food Waste [Mixed].....	15:1
Grass Clippings.....	20:1
Coffee Grounds.....	20:1
Cow Manure w/ bedding.....	20:1
Horse Manure [Fresh].....	25:1
Weeds [Fresh].....	25:1
Fruit Waste.....	30:1

Keeping the ideal (30:1) in mind, it is just a matter of balancing the amount of greens and browns to get your desired results.

Remember, when mixing ingredients, to add enough water so that your pile is as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

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WHAT TO LEAVE OUT

THESE ATTRACT UNWANTED PESTS like dogs, raccoons, ants, and rodents:

Dairy products... Fats & Oils... Meat & fish

THESE PROMOTE HARMFUL PARASITES

that survive in the high temps. of a compost pile:

- Cat, dog, and pig feces

If math isn't your forte try using a calculator to figure out the C:N ratio of your pile. Visit Klickitat County's website and use their compost calculator to figure out the ideal mix of ingredients for your pile.

Search online for:

[klickitat county compost calculator](#)

Or go to this address:

www.klickitatcounty.org/solidwaste/fileshtml/organics/compostCalc.htm

REFERENCES:

Stu Campbell, *Let it Rot*, 1998.

Deborah L. Martin & Grace Gershuny ed., *The Rodale Book of Composting*, 1992.



SPOKANE MASTER COMPOSTERS
& RECYCLERS PROGRAM
2900 S. Geiger Blvd.
Spokane, WA 99224

Sponsored by the
Spokane County Regional
Solid Waste System.



Master Composters & Recyclers are volunteers who are working to promote the practice of home composting throughout Spokane County.

Recycling Hot Line 477-6800
www.spokanecountysolidwaste.org

MATERIALS FOR HOME COMPOSTING



EASY TO GATHER!

Use what you have

Put your yard wastes, kitchen scraps, and select household paper garbage to good use

Stop buying expensive store-bought soil amendments



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