

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

A rind is a terrible thing to waste



Sioux Rogers

I love compost. I don't mean I love compost like for a romantic date. I mean, like, I just love compost.

Now that you are anxiously waiting to find out what's next, how about a list of what *not* to compost?

Caveat: Composting is one the best investments for your garden time, but it is not perfect.

Better not compost

Your compost pile should *not* be a wastebin for stuff like plants that died from a disease, known or unknown. Lordy, think what yucky dreck you might transfer to those precious plants. And do *not* even think about emptying your butt-filled ashtray in the compost. Aside from all the toxins in the butt, tobacco often carries a virus transferable to tomatoes. If you have weeds with seed heads, do *not* deploy them to the bin. Instead, you can cut off the seed heads and use just the weed. No worries there.

Grass clippings are okay if the grass has not been sprayed. If you throw gooshy, rotten, say, tomatoes, squashes, and cucumbers into your compost, plan on possibly having random vegetables anywhere you use it. Seeds often survive.

Even though in the kitchen many edibles go to waste, they may not be what earthworms enjoy. (Earthworms are



Vegetable scraps are easily compostable, but so are cardboard, newspapers, and even old bills. Photo: Ben Kerckx/Pixabay.

indicators of healthy compost and soil but are sometimes fussy eaters.)

All kinds of stuff like butter, grease, cheese, whole eggs, bones, fish, and meat will *not* break down within the confines of home composting. Since they won't break down, they rot and stink, which is an invitation for wild critters to come to your smorgasbord.

This may come as a surprise: Onions, garlic, and citrus have a chemical that kills your beloved earthworms. No walnut shells, either, as they have a yucky chemical called "juglone" that some plants really despise.

It may be tempting, but do not add feces from meat-eating critters—people and animals alike. Feces that have not composted for at least a few years may contain unwanted heavy metals. You do

not want to ingest a carrot or any other vegetable grown in compost that may be laced with heavy metal.

Whew, that was quite a few "nots" for the compost pile. On a cheery note, what to compost is just as important.

Okay to compost

Here are a few weird but common items you really can compost. Important: The item *must* be organic.

Coffee filters, for example, need to be the brown, unbleached type. If you have all-natural clothing in your dryer, the lint can be used. Weird, huh? Have pets? Their fur and your hair are great for compost. Sorry, but not hair with bleach, dye, or other toxic products.

Composting cardboard, newspapers, and old bills is perfectly wonderful. Do it and smile. Also, natural corks from wine

bottles and the contents of your vacuum bag can be plopped into the compost bin.

If I could have only one ingredient to put in my compost bin, it would be spoiled rotten straw or hay. The straw from my poultry is perfect when thrown into the compost bin with any kind of soil.

Rather gross, but not a no-no, is small roadkill. Just make sure to place the carcass way deep into the compost or it may be exhumed by a passing critter.

The items I have rambled off are from my own experience of gardening every which way. Neither of the two lists, "better not" and "okay," are necessarily complete. More than that, you or your most excellent gardener neighbor may disagree about some items. No worries—we are all most likely correct when viewed from another vantage point. What do I mean?

Well, for example, coffee is a common addition to the compost pile, but I insist it needs to be organic. Same with loose tea or tea bags. I do not want nasty, toxic chemicals in my compost.

"Amazingly, we've become a culture that considers Twinkies, Cocoa Puffs, and Mountain Dew safe, but raw milk and compost-grown tomatoes unsafe" (Joel Salatin, farmer, lecturer, and author).

Dirty fingernails and all,
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