

15 What Can We Compost?

Anything that once lived *can* be composted, or recycled in some other way, but it makes sense to limit the range of materials that a Community Composting scheme is prepared to accept. Decisions made at the start will pay dividends. Conifer hedge clippings, for example, are likely to be available in quantity – which is fine if there are facilities for shredding, or space to make some long term compost heaps. If not, forget them for the present. Lawn mowings may appear in abundance, especially in early and late summer. They need to be dealt with quickly – mixed with drier ingredients to avoid odours. Will this be possible? Diseased plants and weed seeds are no problem as long as you are sure that your heaps will be hot enough. (See *Making Compost 1*).

It makes sense to keep things simple to start with; rules can always be relaxed in future when the project has been running for a while. It is also important to have some means of quality control on incoming materials before they are composted (See *Collecting Materials to Recycle*).

The majority of Community Composting schemes recycle only garden waste at present. A few projects deal with cooked food scraps from the kitchen – though these materials are much more difficult to deal with effectively without creating problems with smells and vermin (See *Case Studies 1* and *2*).

Materials suitable for recycling

Weeds	Crop debris
Prunings	Plant remains
Tea bags and leaves	Hedge clippings
Pond weed	Old bedding plants
Autumn leaves	Brewery waste
Lawn mowings	Coffee grounds & paper filters
Manures from vegetarian animals	

Questionable materials

Kitchen food scraps	Newspaper
Cardboard	Perennial weeds
Rose prunings	Diseased material

Don't compost

Cat and dog faeces / litter
Nappies

Will not compost

Stones and rubble
Coal ash
Bottles / Glass / Tin cans
Anything else not of living origin

How will it compost?

Materials vary greatly in how they will behave in a compost heap. Young sappy ingredients, such as grass mowings, rot quickly to a smelly sludge, while older tougher materials may take years to do anything. Some ingredients are wet and soggy, while others are much too dry. Some will make good compost on their own, but the majority need to be mixed with other ingredients for the best chance of a good quality end product. The table overleaf describes the composting qualities of a range of materials, and also discusses the problems that may arise from using “questionable materials”. This information should help in making decisions about the materials that your project is prepared to deal with – and which it would rather not, at least for the present.

Other relevant cards

- Collecting Materials to Recycle
- Case Studies
- Making Compost 1