

## Composting Oak Leaves

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Q. I have a large number of oak leaves and I am wondering if I can use them in my compost

A. I am so glad that you are thinking of composting your oak leaves and not burning them. Burning leaves contributes to our poor air quality and also removes a valuable nutrient resource from your yard. All leaves can be composted, if you have a lot of oak leaves you may need to mix them with other types of leaves, straw or newspaper to keep your pile from getting to acidic.

There are a couple of ways to compost. The lazy way is to build a pile is by layering greens and browns in an out-of-the-way corner and let it stand. The pile should be at least three foot by three foot. You will need to water the pile during the summer to keep moist and you may want to cover the pile in the winter so it does not get to wet. After about 6 months or so it will have turned to compost. Disadvantages to this method are leaching of nutrients in winter rains, and the survival of weed seeds because the pile didn't get hot enough to kill them.

Another way is to hot compost. This method produces compost quickly, in as few as 2-3 weeks. Start by chopping the green and brown materials with a mower or spade so they are no bigger than ½" – 1 ½" and then layer to create a three foot by three foot pile. Keep the pile moist and turn weekly. This mixes the hot center with the cooler sides, and speeds up the process. The less often you turn the pile, the slower the process moves. To get the recommended carbon to nitrogen ratio of 30-1, use equal parts dry ("brown") materials such as dead leaves, dry grass, straw, shredded newspaper or cardboard, etc. and green materials such as grass clippings, wilted flowers, green prunings, weeds, fresh garbage and fruit and vegetable waste. The optimum pile size is 3'x3'x3' and compost in a bin retains heat better. Be sure to mix materials well so they don't mat. Nothing needs to be added to compost. Avoid adding soil, ashes or manure from meat eating animals. Your pile should heat up quickly and have a pleasant odor. Advantages to this method are the quick recycling of waste materials into usable soil amendment and most weed seeds are killed by the hot temperatures in the pile.

Compost makes a valuable addition to your garden soil, it uses you might otherwise discard, and it's easy to create. For more information on

composting check out the following website form the Nevada County  
Master Gardeners [http://ncmg.ucanr.org/Composting\\_Resources/](http://ncmg.ucanr.org/Composting_Resources/)