

## Start A Compost Pile For The New Year; Start With Wrapping Paper

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 29, 2018

Q: It seems like there's always a lot of waste around the holidays with wrapping paper filling a big trash bag. Can I compost wrapping paper? How about tissue paper and ribbon?

A: Yes, some wrapping paper can be composted. It's best to try and reuse or recycle wrapping paper first. I realize in some cases this may be difficult as not everyone has access to a recycle bin and the paper may not survive the unwrapping process, especially if there are eager children unwrapping.

Don't burn the paper. Colored and metallic papers can give off toxic chemicals.

If you have an active compost bin or would like to start an active pile for the New Year, Cornell University has a handy chart for determining if paper can be composted. You can access that chart from [this link](#). According to Cornell University researchers, wrapping paper can probably be composted if it's not glossy, doesn't have a plastic, waxy, or metallic coating, and isn't "shockingly bright"/Astro bright. "Generally, if it tears easily, it's okay to compost it."

The paper should be considered part of the "brown" material of your compost pile. Make sure keep your brown to green ratios are about 30 parts brown to 1 part nitrogen. This is best done by layering the browns and greens in the piles so, as the water dries out of the greens, you're left with the correct ratio.

Here are some examples of compostable materials you may already have that may work to offset the carbon in the wrapping paper:

- Greens (nitrogen-containing) material: grass and shrub clippings (chopped small), wilted flowers, raw fruit and vegetable trimmings, hair, coffee grounds, tea bags.
- Browns (carbon-containing) materials: pine needles, dry leaves, straw, sawdust, crushed egg shells, shredded paper or wrapping paper, coffee filters.

Don't have one? Create a New Year compost pile

Remember to never compost dairy or greasy foods, dirt, ashes, fish, animal products and diseased plants.

If you're thinking of starting a pile for the New Year, here's a fast and inexpensive composting method recommended by the University of California:

- Pick an out of the way, sunny location near a water source as you will need to add water to the pile.
- Decide if the pile is going to be loose or held together with chicken or field fence wire.
- Next, throw together a pile of "browns" — carbon-rich materials such as your leaves and "greens" — nitrogen-rich materials such as lawn clippings, food waste and manure. Alter them in layers like a cake.
- Try to create a pile that's a minimum of 3-4 feet cubed in order to retain the heat needed to break down the ingredients. You want the brown layer to be a bit thicker than the green layer. Too much green in relation to brown causes the pile to get too hot. Temperatures of 120 to 160 degrees are desired and will kill most weed seeds.
- As you create your pile, thoroughly hose down the layers with water. When correctly moistened, the materials should feel like a damp sponge.

- Once you have the pile built, don't add anything more to the pile and turn the pile over occasionally to give it air/oxygen.

*The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email [mastergardener@shastacollege.edu](mailto:mastergardener@shastacollege.edu). The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.*