

Identifying Compostable Materials

 20 min minimum

 Compost process

 All ages

Materials

- 3-gallon buckets for each material, each labeled with a number
- List of sample materials to each place in its own bucket:
 - Shredded paper
 - Leaves (fall leaves)
 - Grass clippings
 - Food scraps (fresh fruit & veggie scraps)
 - Compostable foodservice & bags
 - Wood chips
 - Plant stalks/garden trimmings (include green and brown trimmings)
 - Branches/twigs
 - Straw
 - Weeds
 - Mature compost
 - Immature compost
 - Leaf mulch
 - Moldy cheese, bread, pizza crust or other cooked or unacceptable food scraps
 - Coffee grounds
- Clip boards (one for each pair or team of participants)
- Pencils or pens
- Printouts of activity sheets

This activity has been adapted from Earth Matter, Governor's Island, NYC.



Earth Matter's material matching activity setup at its composting demonstration site on Governors Island, NYC.



From ILSR's training at New Creation Christian Church, Baltimore (2019)

Objective

1. To identify the wide range of materials that can be composted
2. To identify and understand the difference between carbon-rich and nitrogen-rich materials
3. To understand the difference between compost and mulch
4. To learn that some materials such as yard trimmings can be a mix of carbon-rich and nitrogen-rich materials
5. To learn what can and cannot be composted and more nuanced concepts such as the importance of size, carbon bioavailability, and compostable packaging

Instructions

1. Prep the buckets
 - Put a different material in each of the buckets and label each bucket with a number
 - Keep track of which material is in which numbered bucket. Have an answer key prepared.
2. Lay out buckets in a big circle or a straight line.
3. Have each pair or team go around and fill in what material is in each bucket and identify whether they think the material is carbon-rich (a brown) or nitrogen-rich (a green).
4. After the allotted time for the exercise, gather the group together and ask for teams to share what they found.
5. Use the time to explain the difference between leaf mulch and compost, the bioavailability of the carbon in wood chips versus straw, the need to chop food scraps and crush egg shells, the need to keep out cooked food/meat in order to avoid rodents, the need to shred paper rather than incorporating big sheets of paper or cardboard, what compostable foodservice and biobags are and if they are acceptable, that yard trimmings can be a mix of browns and greens, and what weeds are (any unwanted plant – when in doubt, leave it out).



From ILSR training at East Capitol Urban Farm, DC (2018)

Alternative Options



From ILSR training at East Capitol Urban Farm, DC (2018)

- This activity can be altered to use whatever materials that are readily available.
- Another type of container can be used instead of the 3-gallon buckets
- Downscale this activity by using smaller containers that would fit on a table.

Activity Sheet

Match the number of the bucket with what material is in it and note if the material is carbon-rich or nitrogen-rich

Material	Bucket Number	Carbon- or Nitrogen-rich?
Shredded paper		
Leaves (fall leaves)		
Grass clippings		
Food scraps (fresh fruit & veggie scraps)		
Compostable foodservice & bags		
Wood chips		
Plant stalks/garden trimmings (include green and brown trimmings)		
Branches/twigs		
Straw		
Weeds		
Mature compost		
Immature compost		
Leaf mulch		
Moldy cheese, bread, pizza crust or other cooked or unacceptable food scraps		
Coffee grounds		