



## ORGANIC MATERIAL THAT CAN BE USED TO BUILD A NO-TILL GARDEN

by Sheila O'Riley, *The Ugly Gardener*

When you are building a no-till garden, you are actually building a low and long compost pile. Therefore; anything you know about building a compost pile applies to building a no-till garden. Any organic material can be used.

A compost pile or no-till garden requires four elements for the earthworms and friendly organisms to do their composting business. They are air, water, nitrogen, and carbon. Air is easy enough to provide. That's why we start building the no-till garden with coarser material such as sticks or chipped wood as these allow air to circulate under the rest of the layers. Water should be added to each layer as you build the no-till garden. Normal rainfall should be enough for the rest of the year as our goal is not to facilitate quick composting, but to allow the material to remain on top of the surface of the garden as mulch during the growing season in order to control weeds and lessen the need for watering. During long droughts, watch your plants for signs of wilting or stress and water as you see fit.

Nitrogen sources are green plant material including fruits and vegetables, livestock manure, and nitrogen fertilizer. Carbon sources are brown or dried plant material. Most of the material you will use for a no-till garden may be brown (carbon) material during the growing season. You might want to make an effort to add green (nitrogen) material late in the fall after crops are harvested or plants are frosted to facilitate the composting process during the off season. The goal would be to have a mixture of half green material and half brown material. You don't need to mix it; just layer it. This will add nutrients to your garden for the next season. Then next season just add more mulch material as needed. If weeds or grass have grown through, add more layers of newspapers or other organic weed barrier.

### **Green material (high in nitrogen)**

Grass clippings (fresh)  
Livestock manure  
Garden clippings (fresh)  
Vegetable and fruit scraps  
Houseplant clippings  
Pine needles (fresh)  
Nitrogen fertilizer

**Note:** If any of these materials are dry, then they are brown carbon material.

DO NOT USE as they attract varmints

Meats  
Dairy foods  
Fats, oil, or grease  
Pet wastes

### **Brown material (high in carbon)**

\*Newspapers  
\*Uncoated junk mail  
\*Cardboard (shipping boxes, cereal boxes, etc)  
Sticks  
Chipped wood (avoid walnut as is toxic to plants)  
Fall or dry leaves (avoid walnut)  
Straw or hay  
Sawdust  
Shredded paper  
Dry paper products such as paper towels  
Egg shells  
Coffee grounds (including the filters)  
Tea bags  
Dry grass clippings  
Hair  
Feathers  
Lint

\* If not used as the weed barrier (bottom of the layers), tear into small pieces.

