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Composting the Holidays

Utilize Abundant Fall Leaves,
Pumpkins,
Hay Bales,
Scarecrows,
Fir Boughs,
Pine Trees,
Mistletoe,
Holly Garlands and More!

Mary J. Tynes

Composting the Holidays

First Edition

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Introduction

The holiday spirit is upon us from the first fall of autumn leaves until the New Year begins. We carve jack-o-lanterns, deck the halls with holly wreaths and create other adornments to enhance our merriment. Many of these decorative materials can be composted or used as mulch rather than being sent to the landfill. Some require preparation before use and that is what this eBook is all about.

Though not formally a holiday, the fall of autumn leaves is cause for celebration among those who value organic materials. The sudden drop of a large volume of leaves can be overwhelming, so an entire chapter is devoted to creatively using those **Autumn Leaves**.

Pumpkins are a part of harvest celebrations in many parts of the world. In the U.S., pumpkins remain on lawns as decorations until the weekend after Thanksgiving. One year I collected 30 pumpkins from the block on which I live. Multiply that one block by an entire city and you have a lot of pumpkins! Pumpkins are a nitrogen source, which can be handy since fresh grass clippings become scarce during autumn. But pumpkins are also a food source which can generate odors and attract pests if not composted correctly. For this reason, **Decorative Pumpkins**, an entire chapter, covers safety in composting food items, as well as the composting of seeds.

These are followed by chapters for materials used in **Autumn & Harvest Festivals** and **Winter Celebrations**. There is some overlap in the materials used for these two categories. For instance, hay bales are used as harvest decorations in autumn, but hay is also used in creating Christmas nativity scenes. Most materials are listed only once. If a material is not listed where you expect, locate it immediately using the [Index](#).

Finding Materials Used in Your Celebrations

Autumn and winter holidays are celebrated all over the world. There are many similarities among these celebrations, and there is a considerable amount of overlap in the use of specific materials. I was raised in a Christian family in the USA, so the particular holidays I celebrate include Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. I looked through many web sites and shelves of library books on religious and national customs in my determination to serve a multi-cultural audience. Unfortunately, the statements these sources made about American and Christian customs (with which I am familiar) were sometimes so off-the-mark that I didn't trust them as a basis for definitive information on other traditions.

For these reasons, the eBook information is organized by season rather than by names of holidays. Ah, well, an acorn composts the same way regardless of where you live, how you worship, or what cultural tradition you follow.

I included every material of significance in all festivals I researched. Some festivals are not heavily represented here because they were not reported to generate much organic waste. For instance, in the celebration of Kwanzaa, the only organic wastes resulting from the ceremony (as far as the references indicated) were corncobs and possibly a straw mat, if a mat was ruined or ready to be discarded. Both of those materials can be

composted and you will find out how in the following chapters. If you require information on a specific material, you can easily find it using the [Index](#).

BONUS MATERIAL!

Appendixes cover topics which are of interest to gardeners at this time of year:

- Fall Soil Preparation,
- Mulching, and
- Winter Composting

Chapter 1. Materials Which Should Not Be Composted

Let's consider categories of items which may not be composted. Only organic materials will decompose. Organic materials are those materials which once were a part of a living plant or animal. Do not compost non-organic materials, nor organic materials which have had non-organic chemicals applied. For instance, a straw garden hat may be composted. But a straw garden hat *that has been lacquered or painted* should not be composted because the chemicals in the lacquer are not organic.

Do NOT Compost

The following general categories of items should NOT be put into the compost pile because they are not organic:

Acrylic Bubble Wrap Ceramic Foil Glass	Glitter ¹ , clumps of Lacquer Metal Paint Plastic	Rock ² Stone ² Styrofoam Tinsel Wax
--	--	---

¹A sprinkle of glitter will not hurt anything, but don't put clumps of it in your pile.

²Rocks and stones may be used as mulch, but do not put them in the compost pile.

Organic Materials Which Should NOT Be Composted at Home

There are some organic materials which should not be composted in a home pile due to the difficulty of doing so without problems. These include meat, oils, and dairy products. They also include pet wastes where feces may contain harmful pathogens or if pets are sick and/or on medication that may pass through them. If you are concerned about the safety of any material, do not compost it. The following is a list of items that are organic, but which should not be composted in the home pile:

Bones Butter or margarine Cheese Dairy, general Eggs ³	Egg Nog Feces, dog, cat and human Grease Lumber, treated Mayonnaise	Meat Milk Oil of any kind Poison oak or poison ivy Yogurt
---	---	---

³Egg shells may be crumbled and included in the pile, but not the actual egg.

Cautions to be taken for Personal Issues

If you have, or may have, allergies (through skin or inhalation) or have adverse reactions to any material or a material is otherwise toxic to you, do not put it in your compost pile. In some cases, the specific substance you are reacting to may not break down completely. You will be handling these materials, turning them, and spreading them. If you already know you or household members have an adverse reaction to them, don't compost them.

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Utilize the abundance of autumn leaves, jack-o-lanterns, hay bales, scarecrows, pumpkins, fir boughs, pine trees, mistletoe, holly wreaths, poinsettias, and more! Use holiday decorations and materials to create mulch and compost for your garden.

Excerpt from:

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