

Dear Recycle Lady



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Dear Recycle Lady,

Last week you said that organic matter was living matter. Does this mean that I cannot use non-organic foods, that may have been grown using pesticides, in my compost pile? Confused

Dear Confused

Good question. Some of your confusion may be because there are several different definitions for organic. For the USDA, organic is a labeling term that “indicates that a food or other agricultural product has been produced according to the USDA organic standards.” Organic materials, from a chemical definition, are carbon-based compounds, originally derived from living organisms but now include lab-synthesized versions; and organic wastes that are materials that come from plants or animals and can be decomposed by microorganisms. In other words, they are biodegradable. This third definition, organic wastes, is the one that most applies to compost piles. Biodegradable materials, such as vegetables, fruits, yard wastes, and paper products, can be put in a compost pile. However, several biodegradable materials are not recommended and should not be added to a compost pile: pet wastes, animal products, as they attract flies, and diseased plants, that might carry pathogens. Large amounts of citrus peels, onions and garlic are not recommended either as they have an acid level or pH balance that is harmful to worms and other microorganisms. Here’s a handy hint - Cut items into smaller pieces before you put them in your compost pile. More surface area will speed up decomposition!

Dear Recycle Lady,

Are they really going to make fertilizer out of urine? What will they think of next! Astounded

Dear Astounded,

Yes, fertilizer can be made of urine as it contains nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus, all common ingredients in crop fertilizers. A May 14th article in the Charleston Gazette, entitled Pee for Peonies, Creating Useful Products Out of Natural Products, described the research of two environmental engineering professors at the University of Michigan, Nancy Love and Krista Wigginton, who are applying urine-based fertilizer to peony beds. Love said that “collecting human urine and using it to create renewable fertilizers will lead to greater environmental sustainability, as part of what she calls the circular economy of nutrients.” She also states that urine diversion and recycling led to significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and energy.

Dear Recycle Lady,

When cleaning out my garage I found several plastic hanging baskets from last year and several black plant containers with a #1 recycling symbol. Are these baskets and plant containers recyclable? A Gardner Who Recycles

Dear A Gardner Who Recycles,

Thanks for being a recycler. You help to make the environment better. The Recycling Center doesn’t accept plastic hanging baskets or black plastic plant containers. However, several local businesses that sell plants do accept them. They are not accepted by the Recycling Center as there is no market for them. Please don’t be a “wishcycler” hoping that these items are recyclable and leaving them outside the recycling bins. When in doubt, ask an employee.

Good News: The startup, ByFusion, turns plastics into building blocks that can be used in almost any form of construction! They've already recycled over 100 tons of plastic, and they aim to recycle 100 MILLION tons of plastic in the next 8 years. (fto.com)

Come join us at the Recycling Center on Friday, June 17, from 10:00 – 12:00, for demonstrations and discussions on recycling. Bring your questions, comments, and suggestions. We would love to see you.

Have questions about recycling, or interesting information about recycling? Send questions or requests to recyclelady@greenbrier-swa.com. Dear Recycle Lady is sponsored jointly by the Greenbrier Recycling Center and Greenworks Recycling.