

Coffee Grounds in Our Gardens and Compost Systems?



There's a lot of conflicting information around about using coffee grounds in the garden ranging from their contribution to soil nutrition to water retention properties and warding off slugs and snails. This summary focuses on their potential contributions to soil nutrition and soil texture.

There's nothing magic about coffee grounds but nor are they 'bad' . They do contain *lots* of nitrogen and the other stuff we want in our garden soils and compost bins, and they can have a very positive effect on soil textures and water retention.

However there are some pitfalls – applied 'raw' to soils and in sufficient concentrations (above 2.5%) they apparently can negatively effect young seedlings and root growth. Mixed *raw* into soils they may also promote a 'nitrogen drawdown' effect, starving some seedlings of much needed nutrition. So we do need to understand a bit about what's in the grounds and the implications of their use.

The bottom line?

- 1. be wary of adding grounds directly to your garden in any significant volumes (small quantities are probably OK)**
- 2. *much better* to simply add them into your composting mix...**
- 3. ...but no more than about 20% by volume and then**

**4. ...compost carefully for around 14 weeks to ensure digestion.
Pretty straightforward really...**

There's great reading in this article from **Sustainable Gardening Online** (we recommend subscription to their monthly newsletter):

<https://www.sgaonline.org.au/using-coffee-grounds-in-the-garden/>

Quote: "This research suggests that when fresh, uncomposted coffee is added to gardens at volume application rates of 2.5% and higher it will likely *decrease all plant growth and development*. As such, it is probably a better idea to add coffee grounds to your compost to allow for decomposition of toxic components, and for the improved water holding capacity benefits to emerge. It is recommended that no more than 20% volume of spent coffee grounds be added to your compost⁶. Alternatively, if you have a patch that is lying fallow for 6 months or more and you want to reduce the rate of weed growth, then fresh spent coffee grounds incorporated into the soil or applied as a thin layer of mulch, is a pretty good idea!"

You may also find these references useful:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/oct/23/coffee-grounds-are-not-good-for-plants-its-a-myth>

<https://www.abc.net.au/gardening/factsheets/coffee-compost/10089756>

Coffee grounds are a significant and valuable element in the **Semaphore Compost Network**. It's important that they are removed from the landfill waste stream and we can play a significant role in this. The SGA article mentions an upper limit of 2.5% for their use 'raw' in your garden. This is actually quite a lot of grounds in most gardens and may not have a negative effect until you start putting all of your grounds into the one potplant or into your low-volume seedling mix! However the negative potential does seem to be there so we just need to understand how to deal with them properly. ;-)

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