

Q: Can I use eucalyptus leaves in my compost pile? What about oleander?

A: Eucalyptus leaves are fine to add to a compost pile. Research has shown that composted Eucalyptus does not harm seedlings or plants. One of the more popular garden myths is that eucalyptus leaves and bark are 'toxic,' and will inhibit plant growth. You can find references to this on many a website; however it is unsubstantiated and probably based on the observation that little grows under the *Eucalyptus globulus* (Blue Gum) trees found throughout this area. The trees shed large numbers of leaves, creating a blanket that smothers small plants beneath. When this is coupled with the aggressive roots, most other plants don't stand a chance. There are plenty of aromatic oils in Eucalyptus leaves, but those oils evaporate with several days and cease to have an allelopathic effect. Eucalyptus compost has a slightly acidic pH, which is highly desirable given our predominantly alkaline soils. The wood also makes an attractive mulch.

Oleander leaves do contain a toxic molecule, but this molecule is destroyed by the composting process. Lettuce and tomatoes were grown in composted oleander leaves then analyzed for the toxin. None was found. If you are using composted oleander in a vegetable garden, you should wash produce prior to eating, but we hope you are doing that regardless!