

What To Do With All That Poo?

AND OTHER GREENING QUESTIONS FOR HORSEKEEPERS

BY ALLISON SCHULTZ

We all know that healthy bowel movements are a prime sign of good health in our horses. But how green are all those passing greens that sit and steep out back in the manure pit? No matter how big of a hole you dig, the void often finds itself full, and mounting to new heights, faster than you can say “hay burner!”

One horse produces 50 pounds of manure a day – that’s 9 tons of manure a year! Adding the disposed bedding to that sum creates 730 cubic feet/year of waste from one horse. Multiply that by x number of horses, and that amount feeds a growing concern about what to do with it all.

Without proper management, the manure pile builds into an unhealthy eye-sore growing out of your horse property. Often leading to breeding parasites and disease, the dark waste is not good for horse, nor human, nor ecosystem. It’s high time we begin re-envisioning the mounting manure pile for what it’s worth: a great source of amendable nutrients for depleted soils. As horse owners, the responsibility is in our hands to manage this byproduct effectively. Let’s raise our manure forks in support of turning the road apple harvest into something bountiful.

Let’s compost!

Composting is more than a good idea, managing the manure pile is good for the earth. In turn, you’ll also manage fly populations, kill off parasites and create manna to dig gardens with. Composting is one of the many facets of equine ownership and maintenance that you can’t turn a blind eye to for too long before insurmountable issues, uh, pile up. Good manure management practices come with the territory of being a good horse person. Believe me, your horse and your neighbors and everyone downstream will thank you.

Suzanne Webel, BCHA board member, owner of a small band of horses (count 4) and grower of outstanding grass hay, utilizes her manure pile to benefit the herd and her fields and her property: “I have pastures with manure spread, gardens with manure dug, trees with manure mulch moats, and hayfields with manure plowed in. That’s basically what I do – put it wherever I can! And have been doing that for 35 years. I do have a conventional compost system as well, to which I regularly add manure, old hay, and kitchen vegetable scraps.”

Why not point that next wheelbarrow-full towards the garden? Barb Haaland-Michaels reclaims the golden nuggets in her farm’s garden, and reaps the plump, ripe benefits of all the Equestrian Center’s creative output.

If you have a horse, you’ve already got what it takes to start a compost pile. I hope you find Nick Strigel’s article on “Composting 101” helpful. Here are some other resources to sift through:

<http://equineextension.colostate.edu/content/view/170/57/>

<http://equineextension.colostate.edu/content/category/14/29/57/>

BCHA will be presenting a new series in the *Horse’s Mouth* featuring eco practices for horse owners in this time when everything is turing green. First up in this issue: A topical preface on the ease and beauty of horse manure as compost, and what to do with the manure pile up in this era of eco-responsibility and sustainability. If you have any stories or tips about your own eco-equine-practices, I’d love to hear about them. Email your savvy sustainable horse keeping tips to snowshoerendevu@yahoo.com.