

A Guide to Composting Horse Manure

Compost Troubleshooting Guide

Condition or Situation	Possible source or reason	Other Clues	Solution
Pile fails to heat	Pile too dry	Cannot squeeze water from material	Add water/wet the pile
	Material too wet	Materials look or feel soggy, pile slumps	Turn and/or cover pile
	Not enough nitrogen	Large amount of bedding	Add high nitrogen ingredients, reduce bedding
	small pile size	Pile height less than 3 feet	Enlarge or combine piles.
Temperature falls consistently over several days	Low oxygen	Temperature declines gradually rather than sharply	Turn and/or cover pile
	Low moisture	Cannot squeeze water from material	Add water
Odors	Materials too wet, insufficient aeration.	Low temperatures	Turn pile, add PVC pipes, cover
Fly problem	Flies breeding in uncomposted manure		Cover pile with a tarp or a 6-inch layer of finished compost to prevent access.

How to Know When Compost Is Ready for Use

The composting process begins as soon as you begin to pile up your manure. Almost immediately, microorganisms begin their work and temperature increases are often noticeable within a few hours of forming the pile. With adequate airflow and moisture the pile's temperature should increase rapidly to 120°F-160°F and may remain in this range for several weeks. As active composting slows, temperatures gradually drop to around 100°F and then to ambient air temperature. Compost should "cure" for at least a couple of weeks

before use. Finished compost is a crumbly, evenly textured, earthy-smelling, dark material that looks like a commercial potting soil mixture. It will probably take about one to three months for each pile to compost during the summer and about three to six months in the winter. If you monitor your piles with a thermometer you will see a gradual drop in the higher "active" composting temperatures as it begins the curing process and becomes ready for use.

What to Do With Your Finished Compost

Spreading compost on pastures. The easiest way to spread compost is to use a manure spreader and a tractor (or a strong riding lawnmower) to load, pull, and spread your compost. But you can also spread it without all that equipment: all you need is two people, a shovel, and a riding lawnmower, small cart, or pickup truck. Simply have one person drive while the other person spreads a thin layer of compost.

Only spread compost during the growing season (April-September) when plants can use it and when it's less likely to be washed away by the rain. Apply approximately ¼ inch at a time (you don't want to smother the grass) and no more than three to four applications per year. Re-apply only after the previous layer has worked its way into the soil.

Using compost in garden and landscape areas. Compost can be worked into garden beds by hand or with a tiller or added to the soil when planting trees, shrubs, annuals, or perennials. Compost is also an excellent mulch or topdressing around flowers, shrubs, and trees. This mulch will help your plants get through the dry summer with less need for irrigation. When using it as a mulch around trees or shrubs, start three to four inches from the trunk and spread the compost out to the dripline keeping it about three inches deep.