

Humanure - The Use of Human Excrement as a Compost Feedstock

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Humans are animals and animals produce manure. With 314 million humans residing in the United States and over 7 billion roaming the planet, human manure is one source of organic material that should not be overlooked as a compostable feedstock. But it is overlooked, ignored, perhaps even feared and loathed by composting professionals. Why?

The refusal of compost professionals, compost scientists and compost publications to even remotely consider the use of human excrement as a compost feedstock helps aggravate the water pollution problems throughout the world, the loss of soil fertility and the spread of disease associated with fecal contamination of the environment. “Human waste” is dumped, “human manure, or “humanure” for short, a valuable resource, is recycled and in the process converted into a benign and beneficial material familiar to all composters: humus.

How do we get from the toilet to the farm or garden safely and effectively when virtually all toilets in use are designed to be disposal devices? How difficult is it to compost human excrement, including fecal material, urine and whatever else typically goes into a toilet? What does the finished product look like and how can it be used?

We look at these issues through the lens of the author, whose experience has taken him to humanure composting endeavors on three continents, ranging from single family situations to schools, orphanages and large gatherings of people at festivals. The author’s composting process requires no turning or stirring of the static compost matrix and therefore involves no release of odors, harmful bioaerosols or organic material into the air, thereby reducing cost, simplifying the process and making it more environmentally acceptable.

Recycling human excrement deals with a world-wide problem, provides a sanitation system that yields dividends rather than waste, reduces or prevents environmental pollution and enhances public health. The psychological hurdle needed for widespread acceptance of this practice requires research, information, experience and understanding. This presentation attempts to provide some of these missing pieces.