

From The Bedford Extension Master Gardener HELP DESK

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QUESTION: USE HORSE MANURE ON VEGETABLE GARDEN?



photo: randolph.ces.ncsu.edu

We received a call last year from a lady who wanted to know if it is “okay to put fresh horse manure on a vegetable garden.” In speaking with her I learned that there were other underlying issues involved. She stated that her vegetable garden is rather large and has been in production since 1948. In addition, her ‘friend’ wanted to put manure on it because the soil was “hard,” whereas she did not want to and needed to convince the friend to leave it alone.

RECOMMENDATION

With respect to using fresh horse or cow manure I advised her that she needed to find out where the manure is from, and whether any herbicides had been used on the pasture where the animals had been grazing. I suggested that if she was unable to determine the answer to that question then she should NOT use fresh manure because some herbicides applied to pastures can last more than a year. While harmless to animals, these herbicides can pass through the animal, end up in the manure, and still potentially cause damage to susceptible garden plants.

I advised her that the best thing she could do was to pick up some soil sample test kits, follow the instructions, and submit the soil samples from her garden to have it tested for pH levels as well as mineral and organic content. Once that information was obtained she would know what amendments should be added and follow those recommendations.

In addition to the soil sample test kits, I suggested she pick up the following informational articles and brochures:

- Building Healthy Soil (VCE pubs 426-711)
- Making Compost from Yard Waste (VCE pubs 426-703)
- Using Compost in Your Landscape (VCE pubs 426-704)
- Backyard Composting (VCE HORT-49P)



photo: pubs.ext.vt.edu

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

With respect to using FRESH horse or cow manure on your gardens, another factor to consider is that even if no herbicides had been used on the pasture land and the fresh manure was spread and tilled under, there was a very real possibility that the manure would contain weed seeds. [1]

On the other hand, manure that does not come from pastures treated with residual herbicides, and that is handled appropriately and properly (i.e. well composted) can be a valuable soil amendment.

RESOURCE LINKS

Building Health Soil http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-711/426-711_pdf.pdf
Making Compost from Yard Waste http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-703/426-703_pdf.pdf
Using Compost in Your Landscape http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-704/426-704_pdf.pdf
Backyard Composting <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/HORT/HORT-49/HORT-49-PDF.pdf>
[1] Soil Preparation <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-313/426-313PDF.pdf>

All resource links accessed October 20, 2015.

Answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions.

These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances.

For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

MASTER GARDENER HELP DESK

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