

ONE HORSE OR A HUNDRED



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MSUE Equine AoE Team

4 Manure Management Solutions

You've got the horse, you've got the farm and you've got lots of plans. One thing you may not have, however, is a plan for handling the manure your horses will produce. What are the options for responsible manure management?

Stockpiling

One of the most common manure-handling methods is putting it in a pile and leaving it alone (Figure 1). Though this option is appealing to many, it is not the most environmentally friendly or neighborly solutions. Putting manure in a pile and leaving it is not the same as composting it, no matter how long it sits.



Figure 1. Stockpiling manure is not composting.

Composting is an active process that involves a decrease in volume and an increase in nutrient quality, and it produces an end product with many uses. Manure that sits in a pile may be slowly decomposing, but it's also attracting flies and generating odors, and it has potential for environmental pollution through runoff or leaching to groundwater. All of these factors can ultimately result in unhappy neighbors and increased complaints. (For more information on

composting horse manure, read No. 5, "One Horse or A Hundred: What is Composting, Anyway?")

Hauling Away

Another option involves short-term storage of manure that will eventually be hauled away. Local farmers may spread manure on hay fields or crops. A composting operation or nursery in your area may also be willing to accept horse manure. In some areas, manure may be hauled to a commercial landfill. This option is expensive and is not a long-term or environmentally-friendly solution.

Land Application

If you're lucky enough to have adequate land and the right equipment, you may have the option of spreading manure on your own property (Figure 2). Composting before spreading will increase the nutrients' benefits. If the manure is not composted before spreading, the low nitrogen content in common bedding material may reduce soil quality and pasture production potential.



Figure 2. Spreading compost can add beneficial nutrients to the pasture.

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Some people have the option of spreading manure and bedding on arenas. Depending on your soil type, adding some waste material may improve footing or soil consistency, but this is a limited solution. Spreading raw manure on pastures may increase harmful bacteria and parasite levels in the soil. The composting process reduces these risks.

Anytime manure and bedding are spread on land, horse owners should take several factors into consideration. These include timing spreading to avoid neighborhood events, family gatherings and holidays. It is also important to consider weather conditions when spreading manure. If the ground is frozen or heavy rain is predicted, spreading should be avoided because of runoff potential and surface water contamination.

To reduce the amount of manure handled and improve horse health, keeping your horses on pasture continuously may be a solution. Manure may still build up in certain areas, however, and may need to be spread out or removed. The best time to drag a pasture is when the weather is hot and dry — this helps to control parasites in the manure.

Manure is a fact of your horse-managing life. Fortunately, solutions are available for dealing with it. Depending on your setup, one or more of the options outlined above may work for you.

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