

# Making Ripples

## Composting Pet Waste

by Amanda Bancroft

The dirty truth is that we pet owners have to deal with a lot of poop from our beloved fuzzy friends. But just imagine if you were a musher in Alaska: according to the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, "The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the typical dog excretes three quarters of a pound of waste per day – or 274 pounds per year. A musher with a modest-sized kennel of 20 dogs must dispose of more than two tons of dog waste annually! Dog waste is a safe soil additive for revegetation and landscaping when it is composted properly."

Most of the time, pet waste ends up in a plastic bag in a landfill (about ten million tons annually) which does keep our city streets clean but doesn't help the environment or our children and grandchildren who will have to deal with the problem of landfills and climate change.

However, pet waste should not be used on food crops unless you have a rabbit, hamster, mouse, rat, gerbil, guinea pig or herbivorous pet. That's because omnivorous or carnivorous pets like dogs and cats have waste that contains pathogens that could potentially make us sick, although in the case of *Toxoplasma gondii* which is found in cat waste, most people get sick from this protozoa by eating raw meat, not from contact with cat litter or compost. Indoor cats who don't consume prey aren't carriers of *Toxoplasma gondii*.

Composting reduces the volume of pet waste by 50 percent. To build your own pet waste composter, Life Hacker recommends just digging a hole in your yard and putting a curbside-sized plastic or metal garbage can inside. Drill large holes into the garbage can and cut off the bottom. Place rocks at the bottom of the hole for drainage, and put the can inside. It should be completely underground except for the top few inches with no side holes above ground. Add some compost/septic starter to the can after your first couple of pet waste deposits (you can buy starter at Home Depot or on Amazon). Or you can buy a manufactured unit from DoggieDooley.com for around \$90.

What about cat litter? Using recycled sawdust chemical-free wood pellets is often cheaper than clumping clay cat litters, and makes cat waste compostable. Sprinkle pellets with water after putting it into the litter box to help it soften into sawdust, and mix it with your cat's traditional litter brand during the transition. You might want to keep another litter box with just cat litter inside, in case kitty does not adapt to pellets.

When composting pet waste, it's best to take the standard precautions. Locate the new compost pile away from your kitchen compost pile, and far away from a water source. Wear gloves when

handling compost, and wash hands afterwards. Don't put pet waste from carnivorous pets or sick pets into the soil used for food crops, and you should be safe. Happy rotting!

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