

Where there's muck . . .

Rabbit manure has been described as "liquid gold" but its value is often not valued by the rabbit keeper.

This excerpt from John Sandford's *The Domestic Rabbit* puts us in the picture

The amount of manure produced in any stud will depend upon a number of factors such as breed, rations fed, amount of bedding used and so on.

Obviously a bulky ration will produce more manure than a concentrated ration. The weight of rabbit manure varies between about 450 to 640 kg per m³, and a large breed doe with young would produce throughout the year some 0.34 m³ of manure, that is to say, between 150 and 200 kg.

It is necessary that adequate storage or disposal arrangements should be made.

Rabbit manure, again contrary to widespread belief, is one of the most valuable manures of all livestock, as can be seen from its analysis.

On a dry matter basis the manure contains approximately 2.7% nitrogen, 1.5% phosphoric acid, and 1% potash.

The amount of fresh manure required to produce 45 kg of dry manure is, however, only about 64 kg compared with some 110 kg of horse manure, and as much as 220 kg of manure is most valuable.

In some countries the clear manure, that is, manure from self-cleaning hutches, or separate from the bedding, is dried, ground and sold as a concentrated fertiliser. When dry, the manure has little smell and is easily handled.

Many gardeners like to use a liquid manure, and an excellent type may be made by soaking rabbit manure in a barrel of water.

The faecal pellets (about 3 kg per barrel) should be enclosed in a coarse sack and suspended in the barrel for a few days.

An occasional stirring will be of benefit, and the contents of the sack after this time should be returned to the manure heap, the liquid manure now being ready for use.

Fresh manure can be applied immediately to the soil, when no loss of the more soluble constituents occurs.

If, however, the manure contains a good deal of bedding, then it will probably be more beneficial to allow it to rot before application. A layer of soil some 50 mm thick over a heap will efficiently prevent the breeding of flies and prevent any smell.

Although rabbit manure should be freely applied to the garden and to crops for the stock, some breeders, particularly those with small gardens and in urban areas, may find difficulty in arranging adequate disposal.

Under no circumstances should manure be burnt, for quite apart from the waste, the resulting smoke will almost certainly be a nuisance to the breeder and neighbours and problems may easily arise from such breaches of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The most suitable solution to such a problem is an arrangement with a local nursery gardener or allotment holder (one can always get details from the Local Authority Allotments Officer) who will usually be extremely pleased to make regular collections.

Some people do not like to use hutch cleanings containing sawdust and wood shavings because it is often said that this material encourages soil pests. This is completely untrue.

The only immediate disadvantage in the use of raw shavings or sawdust is that there is a slight loss of nitrogen (although this is made up later).

There is no disadvantage if the material is used as a mulch, and it is excellent for this purpose, conserving moisture, controlling weeds, improving soil texture and so on.

If, however, about 4% by weight of sulphate of ammonia is used at the same time as the hutch cleanings, the immediate loss of nitrogen is overcome completely.

Another way of overcoming the small problem is to use the manure for pea or bean crops, which provide their own nitrogen supply.

If the hutch cleanings are composted, then the result is an excellent product for the garden.

RABBIT HOUSING & THE LAW is an invaluable free booklet (part of the members Breeders Pack) obtainable from the British Rabbit Council, Purefoy House, 7 Kirkgate, Newark, Notts NG24 1AD. Telephone 01636 676042.



Composting

Processing your rabbit or cavy manure is simple, advises Allan Trigg



All vegetarian animal waste can be composted along with other organic waste from the garden or kitchen.

There are a few exceptions; mainly anything diseased (that should be burnt) and it is not advisable to compost some weeds e.g. couch grass. Weed seed should also be avoided.

Fanciers will find that hemp based products (e.g. Hemcore) decompose much quicker than wood shavings and, likewise, hay or barley straw will break down faster than wheat straw.

The contents of a compost heap should be kept moist to allow decomposition and this can be accelerated with the addition of stinging nettles (before going to seed). Comfrey leaves are also very beneficial.

Adding soil is helpful too as there will be mini bugs and other micro organisms that will assist with the composting operation.

Otherwise, you can purchase Garotta, a proprietary product for this purpose but I have never found the need. Although not essential, it is recommended to cover the heap with sheeting to retain the moisture and this will also discourage foxes from searching for worms.

There are two approaches to composting: aerobic (where the heap is regularly turned to allow access to air) and anaerobic (without air and where the heap is simply left untouched to decompose slowly).

With a fairly balanced supply of water and oxygen (assisted by the micro-organisms) the former should generate more heat and be more expedient.

Those of a male gender with access to privacy and a watering can, can also improve the nitrogen content!

When it comes to the material content of a compost heap, it should ideally consist equally of a "brown" (dry and dead plant material) and "green" (fresh and often green vegetable waste) content.

Rabbit and cavy fanciers will probably find that their cleanings out are the main constituent of the heap and the droppings will help increase the nitrogen content whilst the dead, plant based litter will provide carbon.

Leaves, I always feel should be kept separate as they rot so slowly and are best put in a black plastic bag when in a damp condition. Tuck them away in a corner and come back in a year's time!

Composting is hardly an art but rather a case of letting nature take its course and I hope that others will experience the simple satisfaction of getting something very useful out of rubbish, and for so little effort.

