

# COMPOST AND MANURE FOOD SAFETY

**Publication  
Number  
31-079C**  
(July 2011)

COMPILED BY: Cindy Fake, Horticulture & Small Farms Advisor, and Kevin Marini, Master Gardener Coordinator, Nevada & Placer Counties

When compost is properly managed, the high temperatures kill most pathogens within a few weeks. Improper composting, however, can pose a health risk.

## Proper Composting

- Manure is an excellent fertilizer and soil conditioner, but NEVER apply fresh manure to growing food crops.
  - Properly composting manure kills most E. coli. This means:
    - ◇ Mixing the compost regularly. This aerates it and ensures that the whole pile reaches required temperatures.
    - ◇ Monitor the temperature. The temperature must reach 130-140°F for at least two five-day periods. Mix the compost between cycles.
    - ◇ After composting, allow the compost to cure for 2-4 months before use.
  - Do not allow cross contamination of mature compost with fresh, uncomposted material.
  - When using aged (uncomposted) manure, apply in the fall after harvest. This allows the longest period from application to harvest.
  - Mix manure into the soil at least 2 weeks before planting, do not leave it on the soil surface.
  - Wait 120 days from manure application to crop harvest.
- If you are concerned about manure, composting plant materials alone avoids potential pathogen problems.



## After Gardening

- After applying manure, turning your compost pile, or doing any other manure-related activity, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Wash tools that had direct contact with manure.
- Don't use the same tools for manure handling that you use for crop harvesting (buckets or gloves, for example).
- Remove manure-contaminated clothing, including shoes and gloves, before going into the house and especially before eating, drinking or preparing food.
- Always wash fruits and vegetables before eating them.



For more info: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/Pubs/foodnut/09369.html>

## Compost Recipe

*Mix the following ingredients:*

- 1 measure** Chopped “Greens” (examples: coffee grounds, grass clippings, vegetable or fruit scraps)
- 1 measure** Chopped “Browns” (examples: straw, dry yard waste, shredded paper, fine wood chips)

- Add enough water to moisten mix to the consistency of a wrung out sponge.
- Cover mix and let sit for 6-8 weeks, stirring lightly every 3-5 days.



*Optional additions:*

- Spice it up by adding your preferred manure as a green. (exceptions: do NOT add cat, dog, or pig manure.)
- A small amount of finely ground phosphate rock may also be added if your soil needs phosphorus.
- Add wood ash after the compost is cooked.

No need to bake — compost cooks itself!!! If it begins to smell bad, mix ingredients and check for proper moisture content.

When the compost is ready, all ingredients should be unrecognizable, and it should give off an “earthy” fragrance.

**“Dig in” and enjoy!**



Development of this information is funded in part by a grant from WSARE.

The University of California prohibits discrimination or harassment of any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, pregnancy (including childbirth, and medical conditions related to pregnancy or childbirth), physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or service in the uniformed services (as defined by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994: service in the uniformed services includes membership, application for membership, performance of service, application for service, or obligation for service in the uniformed services) in any of its programs or activities. University policy also prohibits reprisal or retaliation against any person in any of its programs or activities for making a complaint of discrimination or sexual harassment or for using or participating in the investigation or resolution process of any such complaint. University policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws.  
Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin Street, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94607, (510) 987-0096.