

## Before you head out with your wheelbarrow - Compost, what is it?

Simply put, composting is a decomposition process, which is caused by bacterial and fungal organisms. Large amounts of organic matter can be reduced in a relatively short time to a pile of black, crumbly humus, which makes an ideal soil conditioner.

The decomposition of organic matter adds large amounts of nutrients to the soil. Compost added to soil benefits the soils' water holding characteristics and the structure will improve due to the humus containing substances which cause aggregation (sticking together) of soil particles. In clay soil this means that the microscopic individual particles clump together and more air spaces will be opened up between aggregates.

Compost contains humic acid and other organic acids which help to degrade compounds naturally present in the soil, into the simpler forms that plants use.

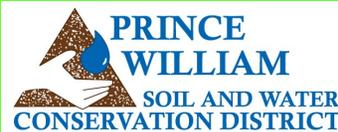


## Horse Manure Compost—is it safe to use?

When fully composted, yes. But many horse owners do not have the time or equipment to fully compost stall waste (horse manure and wood shavings from bedding). You may need to finish the composting process on your property by keeping the material moist and aerating it by turning the compost pile. Check with multiple horse owners for compost that fits your needs.

Completed composted material will be dark brown, light and fluffy. Ideally, there should be no discernible pieces of the original material and should not smell bad, but be a pleasant earthy smell.

For more information on composting, and compost structures, contact the Virginia Cooperative Extension - Prince William Master Gardener Helpline (703) 792-7747 or [master\\_gardener@pwcgov.org](mailto:master_gardener@pwcgov.org) and ask for publication 426-325.



This program has been developed by the Prince William Soil & Water Conservation District in the interest of protecting water quality. For more information about District services, or to add your name to our list, contact us at:

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Conservation District  
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# Gardener's Gold



Your list of farms  
with **FREE**  
**composted manure**  
located near you

***A win-win program for  
livestock owners and  
gardeners alike!***



# Free organic fertilizer

Please call for availability



These local farmers have free composted manure that they would like to share with their neighbors. Contact farms for information about the condition of their compost and pickup details.

Please call ahead of time to make sure someone can help you

## **Nokesville:**

- Robin Lancaster (703) 754-7776
- Jimmie Jones cell (240) 565-5480
- Amy Fries (571) 505-1428
- Alcinda Hatfield (703) 618-7165
- Renee Small cell (703) 943-6601
- Deborah Whelihan - (703) 594-0419

## **Manassas:**

- Bonnie Fulford (703) 361-7409  
*Alpacas and Llamas*
- Caryll Semmler (910) 520-0639



## **Gainesville:**

- Sara Brown (703) 819-6698
- Edith Kennedy (703) 754-7645
- Squirrel's Nest Farm - Karen Bewick (703) 609-6300

## **Haymarket:**

- Vicki Rosner (703) 565-4140
- Debbie Craig (540) 270-0117

## **Farms outside PWC — Clifton:**

- Caroline Squair (703) 815-0235



## **Note of caution:**

Some farmers treat their land with graze-ready herbicides, traces of which may pass through the livestock and be found in the compost. These compounds can interfere with the growth of garden plants and flowers. When picking up compost, always double check that graze-ready herbicides have not been used in the production of their feed and hay.

For more information on these graze-ready herbicides, also known as Pyridine Herbicide Carryover, visit our website at [www.pswgcd.org/resources](http://www.pswgcd.org/resources) under Pest Control/Management.

Please be aware that there may also be weed seeds in the compost. Though heat from composted manure will kill these seeds, composting manure is a tricky business. There is no guarantee that any compost is completely free from weed seeds.