Managing and Composting Chicken Manure

Composting chicken manure is a side benefit of raising chickens. Chickens provide us with hours of companionship, fresh eggs, and……manure! Lots of manure. Approximately one cubic foot of manure is produced by each chicken in approximately six months. Multiply that by the six chickens in an average back yard flock and you have a mountain of manure every year! If you lived on a farm, that may not be a problem but in a backyard and in a neighborhood, there has to be a plan to take care of the chicken manure. How can you turn your pile of chicken manure into something beneficial like the delicious eggs your hens are producing? With a little extra effort the manure can be turned into rich compost for your garden and maybe you will have enough to share with the neighbors too.
Cautions when Composting Chicken Manure

Most chicken owners know that fresh chicken manure can contain Salmonella or E.Coli bacteria. In addition, the fresh manure contains too much ammonia to use as a fertilizer and the odor makes it unpleasant to be around. But, when properly composted, chicken manure is an excellent soil amendment. Compost does not have the unpleasant odor. Chicken manure compost adds organic matter back into the soil and contributes nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium to the soil.

Two Reasons to Compost the Chicken Manure

1. Adding the manure directly to the garden can spread pathogenic organisms to the soil which can be picked up
by low growing leafy greens and fruit.  
2. Fresh manure will burn the plants roots and leaves because it is too strong or “hot” unless it is composted.

How to Compost Chicken Manure

The waste you scrape out of the coop, including all of the shavings, sawdust, straw and hay can be added to the compost bin with the fresh manure. Compost components are usually labeled either brown or green. The bedding materials, along with any additional yard plant debris, leaves, small sticks, and paper would be your brown parts. The manure, and kitchen scraps would be the green parts. When composting chicken manure, a recommended level of 2 parts brown to one part green is recommended because of the high nitrogen content in the manure. Place all the materials in the compost bin or composter. (One cubic yard is recommended as the size of the bin).

Continue to Turn the Compost Pile

Mix and regularly stir and turn the composting material. Occasionally check the inner core temperature of the material. A temperature of 130 degrees F or up to 150 degrees is recommended in order to allow the soil bacteria to break down the pathogenic bacteria from the manure. Turning and stirring the pile allows air to enter and the good bacteria need some fresh air to continue working. After approximately one year, you should have some very rich, valuable compost suitable for your garden. All of the E.Coli and Salmonella should have been destroyed by the heat produced during composting. It is still advisable to carefully wash any produce grown in a compost fed garden.
A Few Safety Precautions

- Always wear gloves when handling manure.
- Do not add cat, dog, or pig feces into your compost.
- Always wash produce thoroughly before eating. Individuals with compromised health should not eat raw food from a manure fed garden.
Janet writes about many homestead and livestock related topics on her blog Timber Creek Farm. Her new book, Chickens From Scratch, is available now through the Timber Creek Farm website or from Amazon.com