

The Benefits of Using Aged Cow Manure in Your Home Garden

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"Wise Use of Manure in Home Gardens"

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One way gardeners can enhance their garden soil is by applying aged cow manure to their soil which impacts all facets of soil health: texture, structure, and fertility.

Soil texture describes the percentage of sand, silt, and clay in the soil. Sand is the largest particle, and clay is the smallest. While soil texture cannot be changed, adding organic material such as cow manure will alter soil structure. Soil structure refers to how soil components aggregate (i.e. stick together) to form air and water spaces within the soil. Air and water are essential for good root and plant development.

By adding aged (3-4 months old) cow manure (organic matter) to a sandy soil you increase the soil's ability to absorb and retain moisture. Aged manure is lower in salts and weed seeds and is less likely to burn salt sensitive plants while easier to handle than fresh, raw manure..

Adding this same manure to a heavy clay-based soil will increase the soil drainage by creating more pore spaces allowing more oxygen into the root zone. Although cow manure cannot change the basic soil texture, it can significantly alter the soil structure .

Applying manure to improve soil health and crop productivity is nothing new. Although manure has been shown to make soil more productive, it is not technically a fertilizer. None-the-less, Amy Bogaard, an archaeobotanist at

the University of Oxford, reported that the benefits of manure to plant growth were first observed almost 8,000 years ago!

Cow manure does not meet the technical definition of a fertilizer because there is no guaranteed analysis as there is with packaged fertilizer. However, cow manure has one thing packaged synthetic fertilizers don't have, ... beneficial microorganisms. These living soil organisms (soil livestock) bring life to the soil and in the process improve the fertility and structure of the soil, making essential plant nutrients more available for plant uptake as well as greatly increasing the water holding capacity and infiltration of water in the soil.

Summary Points

Adding manure to the home vegetable garden can increase soil organic matter and improves over-all soil health. Adding manure to soil will not change soil texture but will improve soil structure and biology. Manure can be applied either as a mulch on top of the soil or incorporated into the garden soil.

There are differences in using raw, aged, and composted manure in a garden. Manure may be aged or composted in a variety of ways, adding more value for the home gardener.

Large amounts of aged cow manure are composted by **San Pasqual Valley Soils** in windrows to produce our most popular compost, **Valley Best**, which is free of noxious weed seeds and screened to make it easier to apply. **The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) certifies Valley's Best Compost as suitable for all professional organic growers.** These strict guidelines insure the highest standards of quality for all your gardening needs.

So take a trip back in time when most crop production was supported by the application of animal manures, none more important than aged and composted cow manure.