



HOME GARDEN

From poop to prep – Using rabbit poop as an organic fertilizer for your garden

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In July 2021, I decided to get myself a male and two female New Zealand white rabbits in order to experience rearing rabbits for meat. Even after reading numerous information and guides on rabbit care and breeding, I did not expect having them inside my house to be very challenging in two ways – they eat a lot and they poop a lot too, at least more than what I expected! According to Faraday (2020), a single rabbit can deposit 200 to 300 poops in a day, and I had three of them! Apart from the problem of maintaining cleanliness of their enclosure, I also had to figure out what to do with their poops. Rabbit poop is pretty straightforward – what they eat goes in, the poops come out! They eat a completely plant-based diet consisting of hays, vegetables and specially-designed rabbit pallets, which were getting pricier in the current Covid-19 pandemic economy.



After doing further readings and talking to others, I found out that rabbit poop or manure makes an extremely effective organic fertilizer for plants in general as they are much healthier for a garden and they do not have to be processed before use (Carter, 2021). As I have planted some hibiscus plants for my Leopard tortoises to eat, as well as other flowering

plants which had stopped growing, losing leaves and failed to produce any flower, I decided to experiment by putting a lot of my rabbit poops on top of the soil of each potted plant. Unlike other manures, rabbit poops do not have to be composted and can be immediately applied to the soil without hurting the plants (Carter, 2021). I was surprised that my lazy method worked as after a few days, all plants started growing more leaves and flowers and they still continue to grow and produce flowers at the time of writing. So, I started to collect my rabbit poops to use as easy fertilizers. I even used them as fertilizers for the rain-of-gold plants on campus.

What are the benefits of using rabbit manure? Firstly, rabbit poops are considered cold manure. Cold manure is a manure that does not need to be composted before it

can be safely used in gardens (Nelson, 2021). You can drop them straight into your garden soil without the need of further processing. It is odourless, dry and in pellet form and it breaks down slowly in the soil, so there is no risk of it burning the roots of your plants (Carter, 2021). As rabbit manure decomposes, it builds the structure of the soil and slowly releases vital nutrients and microorganisms that will promote faster and healthier plant growth (Carter, 2021). The poops are also eaten by earthworms which then help improve the quality of your soil. Next, organic fertilizers in the market are more expensive than inorganic ones. However, with my rabbits giving away their poops for free, I had my own free unlimited resources of organic fertilizers. In addition to adding vital nutrients, rabbit manure can also improve drainage, increase moisture retention and improve the soil structure (Faraday, 2020).

The carbon in soil works similarly to the carbohydrates in a human’s diet. Plants, like humans, need energy and they can only utilize the carbon in soil if there is an appropriate amount of nitrogen. Rabbit manure is rich in nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus, three crucial nutrients required for plant health and growth, as well as beneficial minerals such as zinc, calcium, magnesium, manganese, copper, sulfur, boron, and cobalt (Carter, 2021). Nitrogen helps a plant to generate enzymes, amino acids and proteins to grow greener and stronger, and thus reaching their full potential. Potassium improves fruit quality, reduces the risk of lethal diseases in plants and helps them to control their water content (Carter, 2021). It also helps plants to digest the other nutrients and produce their own food (Faraday, 2020). Phosphorus is required for the conversion of solar energy to chemical energy in plants which aids their growth. It helps plants to develop a strong stem and healthy root network to overcome stressful conditions that are not ideal for growth (Carter, 2021). Additionally, it encourages bigger and higher number of blooms with fruiting and flowering.

How does rabbit manure compare with other animals’ manures? As stated earlier, rabbit manure is cold manure. Other types of manure, like horse, cow, chicken and pigs are hot manures that must always be composted with carbon-rich materials, like leaves or straw, before they are applied to the soil as hot manures release excessive nitrogen too fast that can burn the roots of plants

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and make the leaves brown and stunted (Nelson, 2021). The cold manure found in rabbit poops releases nutrients slowly, extending the time nutrients are available to plants, Rabbit manure contains four times the nutrition of cow or horse manure and twice as nutritious as chicken manure (Faraday, 2020). Furthermore, unlike cow, pig, or horse manure, rabbit poops have a mild to odourless smell so you do not have to worry too much about the smell. However, like any manure, they can attract flies. So, it is advisable to bury them in a bit of garden soil to avoid unpleasant situations in your garden.

Rabbit poops can be safely mulched directly into the soil at any time of planting or spread overtop the soil. However, when dealing with any kind of manure includ-

ing rabbit's, it is best to use gloves as they can carry parasitic diseases, like roundworms and tapeworms (Nelson, 2021). Although rabbit poops are not known to transmit pathogens directly to humans, it is better safe than sorry. For me personally, rabbits make interesting pets but they are just not for me. At the time of writing, I have just given away my rabbits, together with their 8 off-springs and lo and behold, their new owner informed me that more off-springs were born only a few days after. However, if gardening is a major passion of yours, keeping a couple of rabbits might be a good call as you will constantly be getting a never-ending fresh supply of manure from them for your garden. Hence the reason why people often refer to rabbit poops as "bunny gold".

References:

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Healthy plants in the writer's garden, ... Thanks to Rabbit Poop!

