



Composting

One benefit of keeping chickens, besides the egg production and pet enjoyment, is the resulting chicken manure that, after composting, will give your garden a high-energy dose of nutrients. Chicken manure straight from the chicken, however, is too high in nitrogen for delicate plants, and can burn them. Aging chicken manure by composting reduces the nitrogen content and provides a balance of nutrients.

Tips on setting up a compost area for your chicken manure are as follows:

1. You can compost in a barrel or garbage can, but for the large amounts of chicken bedding you're likely to obtain, a larger area is more desirable. You can wire together shipping palettes to make a box (or a series of boxes) with an open top. If you compost only chicken bedding here, you will not have to worry about animals, such as raccoons, digging through it.
2. Fill up your compost area with the chicken bedding. The bedding will most likely be composed of straw or pine shavings, which can be composted right along with the manure and provide the compost with extra organic material. It is best to fill the entire area so that the pile composts at the same rate rather than adding fresh material continually to the pile.
3. Add some water to dampen the pile if it is dry. This helps jump-start the composting process. Do not allow the pile to become soaked through. If your area is subject to substantial rains, place a tarp over the pile during rainy periods.
4. Turn and aerate the compost every two weeks to allow air to circulate through the pile and aid the composting process. Dig into the pile with a pitchfork and turn over material to expose the center of the pile. The center will be where the most activity is happening, and turning allows new material into the center of the pile.
5. Use the compost in your gardens when the pile has substantially broken down and turned into dark soil. Pieces of chicken bedding may still be visible, and that is fine for most garden applications. The process should take two or more months, depending on the season and the amount of turning. You can dig the chicken compost into new beds to incorporate with the existing soil, or you can side-dress your plants by topping with the compost.
6. See http://www.ehow.com/how_4897956_age-chicken-manure-use-compost.html for more information.