

# Regenerative Horse Pasture Care: Using Composted Manure for Grass Growth and Soil Health

by Jon Ott

Healthy pastures start from the ground up. If you want lush, resilient grass for your horses and long-term fertility, the key is adopting a regenerative approach to pasture care. At the heart of this method is one of the most abundant resources on a horse farm: composted horse manure.

This article walks through pasture management practices that promote grass growth and explains how to safely and effectively use composted manure to build thriving, nutrient-rich soils.

## Why Regenerative Pasture Care?

Traditional pasture systems often lead to overgrazing, compacted soil, and nutrient depletion. In contrast, regenerative management enhances soil biology, increases forage production, and supports healthy ecosystems—without reliance on synthetic fertilizers or chemicals.

## 1. Rotational Grazing: The Foundation of Regenerative Pastures

One of the most powerful tools is rotational grazing, which involves dividing pastures into smaller paddocks and moving horses regularly. This prevents overgrazing and allows grass to rest and regrow.



### Best Practices:

Divide your pasture into 4–8 sections.  
Graze each for 3–7 days, then rest it for 3–8 weeks, depending on recovery time.  
Avoid grazing grass shorter than 3–4 inches.  
Use temporary fencing if needed to control grazing pressure.

### Benefits:

Encourages deeper root systems.  
Promotes more even manure distribution.  
Supports a thick, competitive grass stand that resists weeds.

## 2. Promoting Biodiversity with Diverse Forage Species

Monoculture grasses often struggle with drought, pests, and soil depletion. Instead, diversify your pasture with a mix of grasses, legumes, and forbs.

### Recommended Plants:

Legumes: Clover, alfalfa – fix nitrogen and provide protein-rich forage.  
Deep-rooted species: Chicory, plantain – improve soil structure and resilience.  
Cool and warm season grasses: Extend grazing and support soil year-round.

## 3. Managing Soil Health Through Testing and Natural Amendments

Regenerative care begins with knowing your soil. Conduct a soil test every 2–3 years to check for pH, nutrient levels, and organic matter content.

### Key Guidelines:

Ideal soil pH for pasture: 6.0–6.5.  
Use lime to adjust pH and composted manure to add organic matter.  
Avoid synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, which can reduce microbial life and degrade soil over time.



## 4. The Power of Composted Horse Manure

Horse manure, when properly composted, is an excellent source of organic matter and nutrients that can rejuvenate tired soils and promote strong, steady grass growth.

### Benefits:

Adds organic matter to improve water retention and soil structure.  
Increases microbial activity, essential for nutrient cycling.  
Provides slow-release nutrients (N, P, K) without the burn risk of fresh manure.  
Encourages earthworms and beneficial insects.

## 5. How to Compost Horse Manure Correctly

Composting turns raw manure into a stable, safe, and highly effective soil amendment. Here's how to do it:

### Composting Steps:

- Pile It Right:** Build piles at least 3'x3'x3' in size, mixing manure with bedding and carbon sources like straw or leaves.
- Monitor Moisture:** Keep the pile as damp as a wrung-out sponge.
- Turn Regularly:** Turn every 1–2 weeks to provide oxygen and promote even decomposition.
- Heat It Up:** Ensure temperatures reach 130–150°F for at least 3 days to kill parasites and weed seeds.
- Cure It:** Let the compost rest for 1–2 months after active composting.

Optional but ideal: Test your finished compost for nutrient content and stability.

## 6. Applying Composted Manure to Your Pasture

Spreading composted manure boosts soil fertility and supports grass growth, especially when timed right.

### Application Tips:

**Best Time:** Late fall or early spring, when pastures are not actively grazed.  
**Application Rate:** Spread about 0.5–1 inch of compost (or 5–10 tons/acre).  
**Method:** Use a manure spreader, then drag or harrow lightly to incorporate.  
**Frequency:** Apply once a year or every few years based on soil test results.  
**Combine with Overseeding:** After spreading, broadcast grass or clover seed and drag the pasture again. This enhances pasture density and helps out compete weeds naturally.



## 7. Avoiding Common Pitfalls

- Never use raw manure directly on active pastures — it can spread parasites and burn plants.
- Avoid over-application, which can smother grass and lead to nutrient runoff.
- Don't apply on wet, compacted soils, as machinery can cause further compaction.

## 8. Additional Regenerative Tips

Harrow pastures after horse removal to break up manure clumps.  
Allow rest during drought or cold seasons to protect grass vigor.  
Use no-till or frost seeding methods to introduce new plants without disturbing soil structure.  
Consider companion planting and natural hedgerows to support pollinators and reduce wind erosion.

## Final Thoughts

Building a regenerative pasture takes time and observation, but the rewards are significant: better forage for your horses, fewer weeds, healthier soil, and a more resilient land base. By integrating composted horse manure and rotating grazing strategies, you create a self-sustaining system that gives more than it takes.