



# LEPS

Langley Environmental Partners Society



## Horse Manure Composting Program Pasture Management Tips

Proactive management of your pastures will ensure that you are producing good quality forage for your horses, improving drainage, improving soil structure and suppressing weed growth.

The following are several important considerations to keep in mind when managing your pastures:

### Feeding the forage

In order for your pasture grasses to grow well they need to be fed. Water is not enough as many pastures are nutrient deficient. To grow well, grasses need a healthy diet of nutrients such as nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, calcium and magnesium. There are a number of ways you can provide these elements to your pasture land including using chemical fertilizers or by using a natural fertilizer such as the horse manure compost you make on your property.

Horse manure compost is an excellent alternative source of nutrients for your pasture grasses. When using composted manure, nutrients are released gradually which allows them to be used more efficiently by the plants on an on-demand basis. It is this characteristic that reduces the amount of fertilizer that needs to be applied and also reduces the loss of excess nutrients such as nitrate into groundwater.

### Amending the soil

Mulching fields with composted horse manure improves the physical structure of soil. Regular mulching with composted horse manure has numerous beneficial effects such as:

- Increased water permeability (particularly in clay soils)
- Increased water retention capacity (particularly in sandy soils and for all pastures during hot, dry months)
- Soil aeration (leading to greater root depth and healthier grass plants)
- Reduced soil compaction
- Vigorous plant growth

### Seeding

Occasional light seeding of pastures after you mulch with compost can help ensure that your pastures maintain a thick turf that discourages weed growth and reduces pasture damage by compaction.

# Pasture Management Tips...continued...

## Soil analysis

Soil analysis is an important practice of good pasture management. It is important to get a good idea of what nutrients your pasture requires and also what the soil pH is. Soil pH is an important consideration as acidic soils common to the Lower Mainland area encourage weed growth and can suppress grass growth. Additions such as lime may be necessary.

## Pasture rotation

Pasture rotation is essential to maintaining healthy pasture land. Horses can do significant damage to pastures by trampling and compacting the earth and eating grass down. Due to such damage pastures require occasional rest from the presence of horses. A pasture rotation system can be easily initiated by dividing up larger pastures into smaller areas using temporary fencing such as hot wire. If you want your horses out on pasture all the time, create a sacrifice or exercise pasture where you are less concerned about the pasture for grazing purposes.

Pastures used for forage purposes should not be grazed below 5cm in height because as they are eaten down, grass plants are weakened, creating opportunity for weeds to easily colonize. It is vital that grasses are given time to grow back to at least 10cm in height prior to horses returning to the field so that the plants are strong enough to withstand the damage caused by grazing animals.

## Harrowing

It is important to regularly harrow or drag your fields if you are not picking manure out of your fields daily. Manure “pancakes” left out on the pasture do not break down well, attract insects, impede grass growth, and harbour parasites and eggs. Harrowing breaks the manure into smaller pieces allowing the manure to be absorbed into the ground and exposing parasites and their eggs to the fatal heat of the sun. Harrowing combined with a regular worming program ensures the best control of parasites.