

What's new in zoo poo? Composting!

Written by John Johnston

Tons of Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden animal dung once destined for a landfill now is being recycled into compost for use on lawns, gardens and farms.

It's the latest eco-friendly effort of the park, which promotes itself as the greenest zoo in America. Its partner in the project is Marvin's Organic Gardens in Lebanon, which is certified by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to collect yard and animal waste from residents, farms and companies that include Walmart, Lebanon Racetrack and Westin hotels.

Now, though, Rumpke delivers the animal manure and bedding to Marvin's Organic Gardens, which has a 10-acre composting facility on U.S. 42, two miles south of its garden center.

"It's high-quality zoo doo, zoo poo, zoo-nure," said Wes Duren, landscape/construction vice president for Marvin's Organic Gardens.

The arrangement not only diverts manure from the landfill, it saves the zoo about \$5,000 a year on waste management costs, said Mark Fisher, the zoo's senior director of facilities and sustainability.

The zoo had been paying Rumpke \$15,000 a year to pick up organic waste from individual receptacles in the park, Fisher said. A \$35,000 grant the zoo received from the Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District was used to buy an all-terrain forklift and seven large-scale compost bins so waste can be moved to a central pickup area and collected weekly, which drops the fee the zoo pays Rumpke to about \$10,000.

Only the waste of herbivores, or plant eating animals, is being composted. The manure of carnivores carries organisms that can raise health risks.



Nearly a million pounds of manure are produced annually at the zoo in three herbivore exhibit areas that include elephants, giraffes, camels, takins, red river hogs, gazelles, Przewalski's horses, zebras and black, Indian and Sumatran rhinos. The zoo doesn't have the space to recycle the waste into compost, so for years Rumpke has hauled the dung to its dump.