

Environmentally Safe Deer Waste Disposal

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ACCORDING to officials at the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Game and Fish Division (GFD), Alabama hunters harvest more than 400,000 deer every year. They are enthusiastic about their sport and often share their love of hunting with their children and grandchildren. Most hunters are conscientious about proper field dressing and disposal of deer wastes. But some clubs and landowners may dispose of the remains in inappropriate locations such as by the roadside, in an old well, or in a ditch or stream. One group disposed of them in a wetland behind the clubhouse. Improper disposal can pollute the water and cause serious health problems. Now there is a very simple, low cost, environmentally sound solution to this problem—composting! For a minimal cost, a hunting club can build a composter to accommodate waste from about 40 deer per year. It requires very little work, is environmentally sound, has no odor, and, significantly, the composted material can be used as fertilizer on next season's wildlife openings or home gardens. The process is simple.

1. Build foundation — an 8' x 10' concrete or firmly packed gravel pad.
2. Construct a 5' high x 8' deep x 10' wide cell on the foundation. Partition to allow one half to be used for the actual composting, the other for storage of sawdust.
3. Construct a roof over the composting bin.
4. Place a 4-to-6 inch layer of sawdust or hay on the half of the pad to be used for composting.
5. Place deer entrails on the sawdust.
6. Add a quart of ammonium nitrate.

7. Add 4 to 6 inches of sawdust—enough to cover the entrails.
8. Water thoroughly. The sawdust should be damp, like a wet sponge.
9. Add water one or two times a week,

- keeping the sawdust damp (do not water enough to create runoff).
10. When additional deer waste is added, repeat the process.

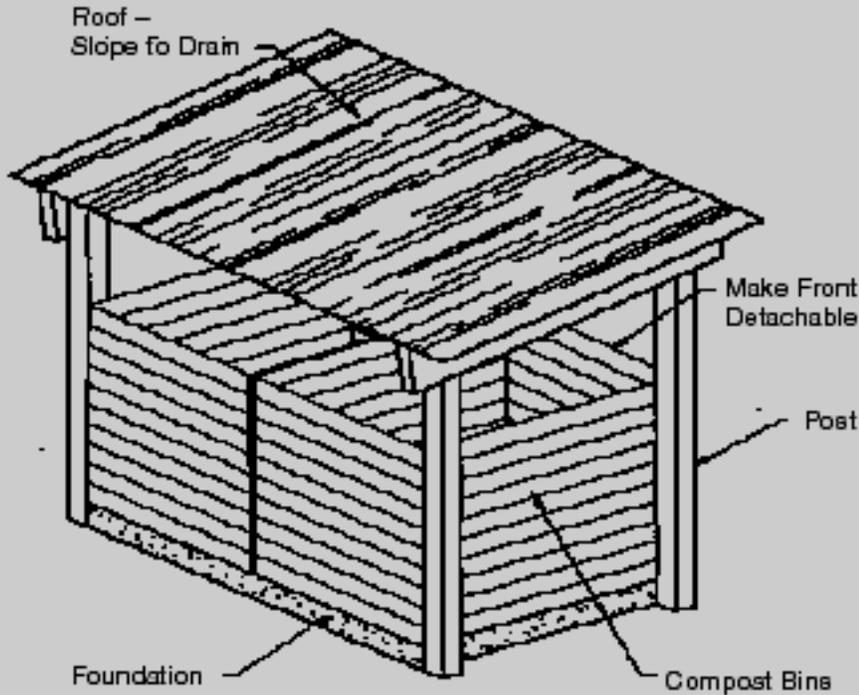
A conveniently located water source is



John Reid, Manager of Scotch Wildlife Management Area views demonstration composter for disposing of deer hide, skeleton, and entrails.

Deer Composter

Not to scale



a must. In six to eight months, the composted material is ready to spread. The composting process can be accelerated by using a two-stage composter that involves building two cells and moving the material periodically from one cell to the other.

Where did this deer composting idea come from? Recognizing the need for an environmentally friendly method to dispose of deer entrails, Norman Burton, Resource Conservation & Development Coordinator with the Ala-Tom RC&D Council, approached Scotch Wildlife Management Area manager John Reid and Supervising Wildlife Biologist Gene Widder about building a demonstration deer composter at the area. The United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) designed the composter, the Game and Fish Division installed and manages the demonstration project, and funding was provided through the Ala-Tom RC&D Council headquartered in Grove Hill, Alabama. According to Burton, funding for this project was

made possible by a state appropriation to RC&D Councils through the Alabama Legislature. Senator Pat Lindsey and Representative Thomas Jackson helped secure this appropriation.

During the summer of 1998, the demonstration model, which can accommodate 150 deer per season, was con-

structed at the Scotch Wildlife Management Area for less than \$2,000. This prototype was built according to NRCS design specifications based on agricultural operations for poultry and hogs. The average hunting club could use a composter about one-third the size of the demonstration model that could be constructed by club members from locally secured materials at a significantly lower cost.

How have the deer hunters responded to composters? According to Reid, "They are a little curious, but once they go down and have a look at it, they think it is a good idea." When asked about negative aspects of composting, Reid responded, "I don't know of any problems. As long as you cover the deer immediately after placing it in the composter, you won't have any odor problems."

Concerning problems, Burton added, "You, of course, have to spend the money to purchase the materials, you have to expend a little labor to construct the composter, and you have to make a conscious effort to check on it about every two weeks and add water as needed throughout the year. That is going to take some time. But some innovative clubs might be able to come up with some method to water it automatically."

Hunting clubs or individuals interested in more information about deer composters designed for their particular situation can contact their local USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service office. ☎

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