

Green Matters

By Crissy Trask

Why is pet waste left on the ground bad, but wild animal droppings are okay?

Wild animals generally defecate in tall grasses where the ground is uncompacted, and their numbers are spread out across a large area. Pets, on the other hand, generally defecate on lawns and in parks where heavy foot traffic and mowing make soil and vegetation unsuitable to “hold” the material. Consequently, when it rains, pet waste left on the ground washes into storm drains and the fecal matter and bacteria ends up in waterways. Pet populations in urban areas are also very dense. For these reasons, pet waste is a significant source of pollution in many urban communities.

No one particularly likes cleaning up after their pet, but it is the law in most communities—and the courteous thing to do when it lands anywhere but on your own property.

Most pet owners know better than to leave waste on the ground, but it’s evident that many do—especially when they think no one is looking. Taking pet waste seriously, however, is every pet owner’s responsibility no matter how objectionable they find that to be. This means removing it from public *and* private property to cut down on contaminated runoff.

Whether you’re a thoughtful pooper scooper or still working to conquer your inhibitions, when you scoop your pooch’s poop, there’s still the matter of its disposal. Pet owners have three imperfect choices:

1. **Throw it in the trash.** Check with your Solid Waste Department to determine if this is legal where you live. Even if permitted by law, when pet waste is incinerated or put in a landfill, it can cause pollution problems.
2. **Flush it.** Flushing pet waste means it will be treated if you are on the public sewer.
3. **Install an in-ground waste digester.** An in-ground digester acts like a mini septic system. With the addition of a digester liquid or powder, waste quickly breaks down into organic matter and is absorbed into the soil. If you use biodegradable cornstarch bags to pick up after your pet, you can toss the bag right into the system. For more information on cornstarch bags and pet digesters, go to www.composters.com/main.html and scroll down the page to Pet Waste Management.