

# Here's the scoop on proper pet-waste disposal

By Tom Watson / Special to NWhomes

Remember when food waste was considered garbage?

Someday we may think about pet waste the same way. It could become a resource, though that's probably a long way off.

Food scraps still go in the garbage most places, of course. But not in the Seattle area, where residential and commercial food waste is separately collected and composted with yard waste. Keeping food waste out of the garbage is even the law in Seattle now.

Pet waste, primarily consisting of dog and cat poop, shares several characteristics with food waste. It's essentially organic (derived from living matter), eminently compostable when done properly, and a little gross to some people.

And, as with food waste, Americans generate plenty of it. More than 12 million tons of dog waste, cat waste and cat litter get disposed of every year.

In Seattle, about 30 percent

of households have cats and 25 percent have dogs, but pet-waste disposal affects us all. Bacteria and other possibly harmful substances in pet waste can end up in waterways and soil, and no one wants to step in a pile left during an afternoon walk.

More than 30 percent of dog owners don't regularly scoop up after their dogs, according to several national surveys. The first step toward responsible pet-waste management is to make sure we're not like those folks.

But once we pick it up, what's the best and greenest way to deal with pet waste?

## In the bag

For now, most health- and waste-related government agencies recommend pet waste be put in a plastic bag and placed in the garbage. Although not ideal environmentally, it's considered the most practical and safest approach. There are some simple ways to

make this process a little greener and more convenient.

Reuse old plastic bags for your pet waste whenever possible. If you use one of those popular dog-waste-bag dispenser canisters on the leash, try to find one that will work with used bags. Instructions can be found on the Internet for making your own leash pouch for bags, and those DIY pouches generally accommodate used bags easier.

If you buy bags, it probably isn't worth spending the extra money on biodegradable dog-waste bags, since nothing breaks down in the landfill very quickly.

When you grab up the waste in the bag, press out the air before you tie it shut. Otherwise you might create a dog-waste balloon that bursts in the garbage can or truck.

Burying pet waste in the yard is no longer a recommended disposal method due to bacteria and other concerns.

## Cat-litter quandary

Flushing small amounts of dog waste down the toilet is fine, if you're so disposed. Even if your cat litter is labeled as "flushable," it should never go down the toilet, and neither should any other so-called "flushable" products.

Many brands of kitty litter come from clay, which is often strip-mined. Consider the many greener kitty-litter products that are made from materials such as wood shavings, grain byproducts and recycled newspaper.

Don't toss cat litter, or any pet poop, in your yard-waste-collection cart, and don't put pet waste or standard clay-based cat litter in your backyard compost bin.

## Future options

At a specialized facility, pet waste can be turned into a valuable compost product. This is already being done on a small scale. Green Pet Compost Company ([greenpetcompostcompany.com](http://greenpetcompostcompany.com)) picks up

pet waste from customers in the Gig Harbor and Portland, Ore., areas and composts it at its facility in Gig Harbor. Green Pet donates the end product to churches and other organizations for landscaping.

A few other companies around the country, such as EnviroWagg in the Denver area, have pioneered similar approaches. "The Pet Poo Pocket Guide," a book by EnviroWagg owner Rose Seemann, is coming out this spring. It explains how the process works and makes the case for public acceptance.

## Note to readers

This is my last EcoConsumer column, which has run in various sections of The Seattle Times since April 2005. I'll continue doing environmental public outreach through the King County EcoConsumer program, so please keep the questions and comments coming (including on Twitter: @ecoconsumer). I've really enjoyed writing the column these past 10 years. Thanks to the readers and the Times for all your support!