

## Pathogens in the Compost Pile (continued)

Good quality compost is pathogen-free. Gardeners that produce compost from manure\* need to play it especially safe to avoid sickening themselves and their families because incompletely aged manure carries pathogens that can potentially sicken humans. The high temperatures generated by microbial activity during the composting process will ideally kill human pathogens. However, the effectiveness of this destruction depends on factors such as oxygen levels, moisture content, materials being composted, and the duration of killing temperatures in which the microbes are exposed.

On the other hand, fully aged compost is expected to be free of pathogens, but there exists the possibility of contamination by the presences of unwanted pests like rodents and birds droppings. Therefore, it is prudent to take basic safety precautions when handling compost:

- Avoid contamination of open skin sores or punctures by covering them before working with compost or even better postpone yard work until wounds have healed.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a dust mask when turning the compost pile; some sensitive individuals can develop allergic reactions to fungal spores.
- Protect your eyes from flying particles with safety goggles.
- Wear shoes intended for garden use only.
- Wash your hands after working with compost.

\*Always avoid putting cat or dog waste in compost piles. These manure sources contain disease organisms that can survive the compost process and may attract other animals.

For more information:

- [Home Composting](#), Bulletin #1143
- [Home Composting Basics](#) (video)
- [How Compost Happens](#), Bulletin #1159
- [How to Home Compost: A Compost Recipe](#) (video)
- [Worm Composting](#) (video)
- [Guidelines for Using Manure on Vegetable Gardens](#), Bulletin #2762
- [Five Steps to Food Safe Fruit and Vegetable Gardening](#) [Word]
- [Garden Safety in Maine](#) (video)