

Reduce Your Dog's Carbon Poo Print One Flush at a Time

Chances are good that you've had the same thought as thousands of eco-savvy dog stewards: "Every day I pick up poop in a plastic bag and throw it in the garbage. How dumb is that?"

Does it make better sense to simply flush it down the toilet? If you have an average sized dog – say, a 25-lb. beagle – you dispose of around 274 pounds of dog waste a year. That might be more than you weigh! Multiple dogs, of course, up the ante. Flushing is not a novel idea.

Plans for animal shelters and dog daycares now design flushing systems into the kennel areas so that they can be easily cleaned. Caretakers simply hose waste directly into built-in drains that flow into the same sanitary sewers servicing human toilets. So the dog waste winds up at a local treatment facility. After sanitation, the water can be released or reused and the left-over sludge, might be re-purposed as a soil conditioner.

Flushing has always been a reliable solution for people with small, elderly or disabled dogs that do their business in a controlled indoor area such as a litter box or synthetic grass pan. In these cases, scoopers or even toilet paper are useful for pick up. But what if your dog downloads outdoors? Is it worthwhile bringing the booty home for a flush? If you're game to try flushing and have a moderate "ick factor" threshold, bear with me.

Flushing loose dog waste is far from convenient. And you can't flush dog waste in a regular plastic pick-up bag. Do you really want to send a bag that will never degrade in a meaningful time frame to your local treatment plant's garbage patch?

But if flushing dog poo seems like a reasonable approach to you, try thinking outside the standard plastic bag. Consider using flushable polyvinyl alcohol dog bags that are “hydro-biodegradable.” But before buying in whole hog (dog?), consider the pros and cons.

Flushables cost around 12-20 cents per bag, so they’re more expensive than commercial plastic pick-up bags. But you can find some real bargains online. Read the claims and reviews carefully before hitting the “buy” button. You might want to compare several bags in small quantities before coming to conclusions about their usefulness and purchasing in bulk.

These bags may not stay intact when transporting dog doo long distances, so you might need to use them in combination with a waterproof container or baggie. There are also many fine-looking leak-proof, washable totes, pouches and clip-on holders on the market that are made for that purpose.

Before using your flushable bag, experiment to see how long the bag will hold up without disintegrating at room temperature. You can do this by filling the bag with wet food scraps and setting it in the sink. While you can’t always perfectly time your doggie road trips or control the heat of the day, at least you won’t have any surprises regarding bag performance. Keep the process green by knotting the top of the flushable.

If your dog has giant paws or you pick up after multiple pets, don’t dispose of a sizable doo dump in a single flush. The bags may be flushable, but none claim to be miraculous. The labyrinth of traps, wax rings and closet bends inside residential toilets were never intended to handle mega masses, let alone mega masses compressed in bags.

Newer toilets have larger openings and are less likely to overflow than older models. You *do not* want dog waste collecting in your toilet waiting for a plumber to arrive.

You *do not* want dog waste backing up over your floor. Be conservative and use common sense when testing your toilet's capacity for flushables. Use multiple bags with limited contents whenever possible.

Don't flush dog waste into toilets connected to septic tanks. Dog waste contains quite a bit of fur and the bacteria in tanks do not readily digest hair. Hairy residue could obstruct emitters that drain effluent into the soil, requiring the services of your favorite honey dipper.

You've probably seen online lessons on how to toilet train your cat. *Bad idea!* Feline poo might contain *Toxoplasma gondii*, a disease agent affecting marine mammals, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems. You don't want to release that stubborn parasite into waterways.

But, if you have a really smart, eager-to-please, dare-I-say saintly dog, you might entice him or her to pot-sit. Yes, people teach them to do that. Search "train dog to use toilet" and let me know how it goes. Be sure to leave him or her the latest edition of the *Daily Wag*.

Whether you have a single dog, a small pack, or run a pet care facility, a separate outdoor flushing system for pets might work well for you. Any dedicated septic system for dogs will be pricey. The least expensive option requires contracting with a reputable plumber to install a direct access line into the sanitary sewer connection on your property. Doo can simply be dropped or washed into an entry hatch. Be sure to include a lid or other mechanism to trap sewer odor.

Manufacturers offer some truly inventive systems for dog waste flushing at high-volume facilities. Products with whimsical names like "Powerloo" and "Whoopsie Away" are easy to find via online searches. All require professional installation.

At the exit end of the sewer line, flushed dog waste is processed and tested per EPA standards. The resulting

biosolids might be buried, landfilled or (best-case scenario) used as a fertilizer. You can even buy bagged soil amendments made from sewage sludge to top dress your lawn or feed your garden.

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District, a pioneer in this field, has been producing and distributing Milorganite for 85 years. These heat-dried biosolid pellets are available at garden centers throughout the country. Other waste facilities have been following Milwaukee's lead, turning treated solid waste into natural fertilizer and reducing the need to manufacture chemicals or mine minerals to enrich soil.

If flushing proves to be a practical approach for your household, you'll dispose of fewer plastic bags, divert organic waste from your local landfill, and recycle your dog's waste – all gifts to the natural world.

Further reading:

- *Dog and Cat Populations Are Approaching Human Numbers – Whwere are the Pooch and Kitty Loos?*
- *Pets and Their Poop* – Natural Resources and Defense Council
- *Coquitlam Wants You to Flush Your Dog's Waste* – HuffPost British Columbia
- *The Pet Poo Pocket Guide: How to Safely Compost and Recycle Pet Waste* – Rose Seemann, New Society Publishers

Recommended Reading:

- *The Top 5 Worst Pet Food Ingredients*
- *Cancer cure (for dogs only)*
- *Dog and Cat Populations Are Approaching Human Numbers – Whwere are the Pooch and Kitty Loos?*