

Think Brown

the politics of poop and the planet

Sunfrog (Andy “Sunfrog” Smith)

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Discussed in this article

Joe Jenkins, *The Humanure Handbook*. Jenkins Publishing: PO Box 607, Grove City, PA 16127 (jenkinspublishing.com). To order, call the distributor (1-800) 639-4099.

First published in the mid-1990s, Joe Jenkins' *Humanure Handbook*—now in a second printing and a revised, expanded version—is already a classic among the down-to-earth, back-to-the-land crowd. The book's premise is simple: composting crap can create a better world; in other words, recycling human excrement is part of a larger spiritual, scientific, and social program to redeem the biosphere and curb humanity's role as an ecological parasite and cultural pathogen. Without changing our waste management policies and philosophies, Jenkins knows we are on the path to pooping up the planet with pollutants, until the former paradise is soiled beyond repair. picking up where many hippy-type r composters left off in the 1970s, Jenkins wants the shit to hit the fan concerning our attitudes towards the stuff that comes out of our collective assholes. While dozens of new-age, self-help, and green-living manuals are cranked out each year to peddle paradigm shifts and lifestyle tweaking; Jenkins' manure manifesto distinguishes itself from so much touchy-feely gobbledygook due to the precise manner in which he makes his arguments. He combines humor and humility, extensive empirical research and compelling unpretentious rhetoric to dispel myths about—and create an appreciation for—our doo-doo. That is, while many books of the eco-living genre read as though their writers are full of shit, Jenkins clearly has his shit together.

Jenkins has a name for the mental disease best paraphrased as dread of one's own dung: fecophobia. So severe is this aversion to our natural expulsions, over the last century we've created a complex web of wasteful practices to deal with them. These practices, in short, are fouling up our most precious, life-sustaining resource: water. Despite powerful myths to the contrary, getting closer to nature and recycling our own is an infinitely safe and more sanitary solution to cats strophic waste management problems.

Not only does re-using our poop keep us from further contaminating public lakes, rivers, and streams, it creates one of the best and cheapest fertilizers available for the home garden. The circle is elegant and unbroken: grow food, eat food, eliminate excrement, re-use seasoned compost as fertilizer to grow food, and so on. While Jenkins anticipates every counterargument and provides exhaustive evidence, the methods he describes to create a simple sawdust toilet and compost pile are actually quite simple.

Once moving to Tennessee in 1996, I've helped oversee my rural collective's poop recycling situation. Our whole system cost under \$50 and has provided us each spring with a pile of nutrient-rich, dark, lush loam to use on the garden. When I see folks spend dollars on plastic bags full of potting soil to plant the spring flowers, I want to shake them out of their stupor: “You can make this yourself! Recycle your shit!”

Jenkins has created a highly-readable, deservedly-popular, self-published book that offers hope that humans will no longer harbor irrational fears about feces and move on to dealing with the real shit: creating a livable world where our species ceases to destroy its habitat.

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