



Joseph Jenkins, Inc./ Ecological Sanitation International

The Humanure Store

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143 Forest Lane, Grove City, PA 16127 USA

Ph: 1-814-786-9085; Toll Free: 1-866-641-7141; Fax: 1-814-786-8209

About the Toilet Cover Material

The “cover material” is what is used in the toilet to prevent odor, block insects, and create the proper balance of nitrogen and carbon to encourage composting. Toilet contents (feces and urine) are buried under the cover material. There should be a clean layer of cover material on top of the toilet contents at all times. If the cover material is of the correct consistency and moisture content and used in adequate amounts, the Loveable Loo will be odorless no matter where it is located, without the need for venting. If an odor is detected, then more cover material should be used. If the cover material does not seem to be completely blocking odor, then it may not be correct material (it may be too dry and airy, or too coarse).

The sample we are including shows a suitable, commonly used cover material. It is sawdust from Pennsylvania sawmills where logs are sawn into rough boards. Any fresh or rotted sawdust from any tree type seems to work. The sawdust is not kiln dried and is still biologically active. The Loveable Loo toilet system was discovered in 1977 by Joseph Jenkins because of the availability of local Pennsylvania sawdust and its efficacy as a “biofilter” to block odor. Human excrement, balanced with carbon, is used to feed microorganisms in a compost environment. The finished compost is then used to feed the soil, and soil is used to feed plants. Human excrement is never used directly to feed plants or is it to be disposed of directly into the environment. The Loveable Loo provides a means for collecting human excrement in an odor-free and hygienically safe manner and then directing it into a safe and ecological composting system. You must construct your own compost bins or have your toilet contents collected by someone who will compost it for you.

KILN DRIED SAWDUST: Kiln dried boards make sawdust that is light and airy and may allow some odor to pass through. If you have a large amount of kiln dried sawdust, leave it outside in a pile where it can get damp and rehydrated and again become biologically active. It will then be a more effective cover material. Sawdust from particle board and plywood can be used as well, but the resulting compost is not recommended for food crops, only ornamental plantings. If using undampened kiln dried sawdust, you may find that you need a heavier layer of cover material to prevent odor and that the loo therefore fills up faster.

WOOD CHIPS AND SHAVINGS: Wood chips and shavings are not recommended in home-based compost piles. Very thin wood shavings will work, but they do allow odors to escape and are slow to break down in compost. Larger, municipal-sized compost piles can better utilize wood shavings. Wood chips are not recommended. The larger the wood particles, the less available they are to the bacteria that heat up the compost pile. Fine or tiny wood particles work best when being used as a cover material in the loo.

SUGAR CANE BAGASSE: Another toilet cover material we have used with good success in tropical locations is sugar cane byproduct (bagasse). It also makes a good cover material in the compost bins.

OTHER COVER MATERIALS: Humanure composters from all over have reported that they successfully use rotted leaves (rake them into a pile and let them sit and rot), fresh leaves, rice hulls, peat moss, shredded junk mail (perhaps moistened first), and coco coir, among other things. Remember that the cover material **MUST** be carbon based (i.e. it will ignite and burn if dried out and lit with a match).

WOOD ASHES: Wood ashes are **NOT** a suitable cover material. They are mineral based, not carbon based, and they do not benefit the microorganisms in a compost pile.

IN YOUR COMPOST BIN: You must also use a cover material in your compost bin, but you don't need a fine material there. Hay, straw, grass, leaves, and weeds will all work. Remember that you don't put things **ON** a compost pile. You put them **IN** a compost pile. Pull the cover material aside, dig a little hole, add your fresh organic material, bury it, pull the cover material back over it, then add clean cover material on top. Lay a piece of wire fence over it to keep animals out.