

Manurial Value of Leaves.

"It was in one of the Middle States," says a writer in the New England Farmer, "where this experiment of manure with leaves was tried and the soil was a light sandy loam. There was not fertility enough in its natural condition to produce over twelve bushels of shelled corn to the acre. Having previously applied commercial fertilizers of various names and brands on the same description of land with a resulting balance on the debtor side of the ledger, and not being able to obtain stable manure except at an exorbitant price, I set about the collection of leaves for the compost heap. A neighbor very kindly gave me permission to remove all the leaves from his woodland that I might desire, and in the hollows and among the fences I found them in large quantities in a fresh as well as a decayed condition. I collected 150 one horse loads in the course of fall and winter. Afterward I could not help thinking that my neighbor's wisdom was in inverse proportion to his generosity. The leaves, except enough to furnish bedding for a horse, a cow and a pig, were deposited in a basin-shaped barn-yard. The contents of the stables were daily added to the pile, and a load of leaves was added from time to time, the precaution being taken to keep the mass well moistened. By March my compost heap had attained gigantic dimensions. It was then carefully forked over with a manure fork and covered with two or three inches of earth. During the process of fermentation which soon ensued, water was occasionally added to check the tendency of excessive heat and hasten the decomposition and oxidation of the leaves. A marker somewhat in the shape of a sled with runners four feet apart was run both ways across the field, and at the intersection of the lines some of this compost, which when opened, was found to be well rotted and of a tolerably dark color, was dropped. Now for the result. The corn was planted the 1st of May. The plant from its first appearance was noted for its dark, rich color, a color that it retained nearly to the period of maturity. The growth was rank, the foliage luxuriant. There were about twelve ears in the field. It was cultivated twice and hoed once. Care was taken to keep the ground as level as possible. The product a little over twelve hundred bushels of sound and merchantable corn in the ear, besides some inferior ears which I fed to my pigs. It must be remembered that all the animal manure in the compost heap was derived from a horse, a cow and pig. Consequently most of the plant food which fed and nourished those 1,200 bushels of ears of corn was furnished by the decomposed forest leaves. To be sure it required time and labor to collect them, but that is equally true of all agricultural operations. Now when I read anything in disparagement of forest leaves as an aid to fertility of the soil I recall the little experiment of mine more than twenty years ago and smile with incredulity. And I think I am justified in doing so by the results of that experiment. Since that time I have, as opportunity offered, made use of leaves to enlarge my compost heap, first using them for bedding for my animals, and for that purpose consider them of great value."

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