



Cow Pie

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Martok

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Photo by Sue Weaver My mom is weird! Yesterday she was taking pictures of cow pie. Call it cow manure, cow pat, cow plop, or bull cookies, it's just plain dung. When we asked why she'd want pictures of that, she said, "for my cow book."

Mom has learned a lot about cow pie while researching her book. According to University of Wisconsin figures, a typical dairy cow makes 148 pounds of plop every day. That's 4440 pounds a month or 54,020 pounds a year. We're glad they don't do it in our barn!

Cow manure is composed of spent fiber but also nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and micro-nutrients like sulfur and boron. Whatever a cow eats that doesn't become meat or milk becomes manure.

Cow pie is also 92 percent moisture—that's why it flops when it hits the ground. Mom says when she was a kid, she and her cousins held a cow plop war. They scooped globs of fresh flop up on the end of a stick, and then swung the stick overhand to fling the manure. Cousin Susan caught a glob in the face. She told her mom and everyone was in deep...you know what.

In the olden days on the prairie, where there were very few trees, Native American people used buffalo chips (dried buffalo flop) for fuel. It burns hot, clean, with a clear, bright flame and it has no nasty scent.

By the time white settlers arrived, the buffalo were gone but most everyone had at least one cow. So, they cooked their food and heated their sod houses with cow chip fuel. Gathering a winter's supply was serious business, and an extra wagon load of chips could be taken to town and bartered for other goods.

In some parts of the world, people still use cow chip fuel. In India, where cow manure is called gober, cowherd men and women knead cow pat into melon-sized balls and dry in the sun for three or four days. Then the balls are stored near the kitchen for cooking fuel. In hot, dry areas of India, people also plaster interior walls in their homes with cow dung mixed with fiber. It's like adobe and dried cow flop doesn't stink.

Cows make a lot of urine, too, and you'll never guess what an Indian organization is doing with that? They're making a fizzy, soft drink called Gau Jal (Sanskrit for "cow water") to take the place of America's Pepsi and Coke. We asked Mom if she'd drink it and she said, "No way!" Would you?

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