

NEWS > ENVIRONMENT

What to do with all that zoo poo? Dallas Zoo, Fort Worth company have a plan for animal waste

The goal is to reduce methane emissions and conserve water in gardening and landscaping.



Compacted waste from herbivores at the Dallas Zoo is shown in Stage 1 at Silver Creek Materials on Monday, Feb. 7, 2022, in Fort Worth. The Dallas Zoo is partnering with Silver Creek to create compost from the waste called Zoo Poo. (Juan Figueroa / Staff Photographer)

The Dallas Zoo and a Fort Worth company have partnered to create a product that's nothing to sniff at: Zoo Poo.

The compost, which will be available for purchase later this month, is made out of hay, bedding and the manure of several of the zoo's herbivores: elephants, gazelles, zebras, red river hogs, hippos, okapi and goats.

The product is 100% organic and suitable for landscaping, flower beds and even produce gardens, said Sean Greene, the zoo's executive vice president of park operations.

"For several years, it's been on our mind of how we can repurpose millions of pounds of animal waste every year," he said.



Compacted waste from herbivores at the Dallas Zoo is shown in Stage 1 (foreground), Stage 2 (center) and Stage 3 (background) at Silver Creek Materials on Monday, Feb. 7, 2022, in Fort Worth. The zoo is partnering with Silver Creek to create compost from the waste called Zoo Poo. (Juan Figueroa / Staff Photographer)

The zoo’s endeavor with Silver Creek Materials, a composting facility in west Fort Worth, mimics similar efforts across the country that prevent animal manure — which turns into methane emissions as it decomposes — from piling up in landfills. The process can yield between 250,000 to 500,000 pounds of rich organic compost annually, said Jennifer Lutz, Silver Creek’s business development manager.

<https://youtu.be/MdVIR82FYok>



The goal for this year is to transport more than 2 million pounds, diverting about 75% of the zoo's waste away from landfills, Greene said.

"You can see how important this is," he said. "Especially when the zoo has a sustainability goal to divert 90% of our waste away from the landfills by 2030."

The Dallas Zoo, Silver Creek and several specialty landscaping shops across Dallas-Fort Worth will start selling the compost in late February. All locations will sell 1-cubic-foot bags for \$12.99, while Silver Creek Materials will also sell in bulk and the Dallas Zoo gift shop will have 4-quart containers for \$19.99.



Although a truck making the 42-mile trek from Dallas to Fort Worth two or three times weekly increases carbon emissions, Silver Creek Materials CEO Marshall Dow said the net environmental impact is positive.

The material decomposes in the presence of oxygen in what's known as aerobic composting, which can reduce the waste's carbon emissions by up to 90%, he said.

While improved air quality is one of the most significant impacts, Lutz said the product also returns benefits to the earth.

"When you make a compost, you're actually putting something in the soil that retains water, and you're protecting that resource," she said. "Plus, compost is a natural fertilizer, and you're not having to put artificial fertilizers that could infiltrate a watershed and contaminate groundwater."

As part of the partnership agreement, a percentage of the Zoo Poo sales will support the Dallas Zoo's [Protecting the 12](#) wildlife conservation program, which focuses on saving several species, including native Texas wildlife.

“If the Dallas Zoo can begin to recreate the inroads for other zoos to do the same thing, that’s great,” Greene said.