

Composting Toilets: All You've Ever Wanted to Know But Were Afraid to Ask!

November 19, 2012 - 15:24



[EcoCamp Patagonia](#) is proud of its top-of-the-range, eco-friendly composting toilets and would happily shout about them from the top of the [Torres del Paine](#) Towers. But talking toilets has always been a bit taboo, and many people would rather ignore the topic altogether. As a result, the major environmental issues surrounding conventional toilets often get ignored whilst composting toilets are shrouded in myths and treated with trepidation. We think it's high time we started to talk about toilets and answer the questions you've always wanted to ask, so join us in celebration of [World Toilet Day](#) as we lift the lid once and for all on the composting toilet!

What's so wrong with conventional toilets?

The conventional toilet is fine in terms of sanitation, taking our waste far away so we never need think about it again. Out of sight, out of mind! But there's a tendency to forget that they're not great for the environment. When you flush, the

waste is whisked away through the pipes and sewers to a water treatment facility, where it's cleaned before being returned to the natural world. So what could be harmful in that? Well a conventional toilet uses anything from 1.5 gallons to 5 gallons of water for just one flush. To give you an idea of just how much that is, picture a standard office water cooler with one of those large blue bottles on top. That's 5 gallons. Now multiply that by the number of times you visit the bathroom in a day and you'll get some idea of how much water you're using. Then think about where all that water has come from and consider how much energy is needed to process it before it can be returned to the water cycle and it's starting to look less environmentally sound. On top of all that, when you're somewhere remote and off the grid like [Patagonia](#), the only option for dealing with waste from a conventional toilet is to install a septic tank, which is highly destructive to the landscape.

What's so great about composting toilets?

Composting toilets are great solution in areas of the world without good plumbing and sanitation because they can be easily installed without the need for miles of piping to connect them up to a water treatment facility. The main reason for this is that they don't use water - or use very little, depending on the model - which makes up 90% of the waste that comes from the traditional toilet so they reduce the drain on one of the world's most precious resources. Meanwhile, human waste is composted without the need for harmful chemicals or septic systems that would damage fragile and unique environments such as Torres del Paine National Park. Instead of requiring energy-intensive methods to neutralise the harmful effects of human waste, the composting toilet uses naturally occurring processes to transform it into compost that can be used to add nutrition back into the soil. When using a composting toilet, you can give yourself a pat on the back every time nature calls, knowing you've given back to the earth. It's not a bad way to do carry out your good turn for the day!



How do composting toilets work?

One of the main advantages of the composting toilet is that they can be extremely simple, or make use of the latest technology depending on the context in which they're installed. The most basic of composting toilets can be improvised with a bucket and a handful of sawdust, whilst there's also a whole range of specially designed hi-tech composting toilets on the market. Some have separate pipes for liquids and solids, whereas others use a different system to cleanly evaporate any excess water back into the atmosphere, but all work in pretty much the same way. The user does their business as usual and then throws in a handful of a bulking agent such as sawdust, peat moss or coconut fibres to create air pockets in the mixture. This allows for natural friendly microbes to break down the waste aerobically - using oxygen - which is a much faster process than that used in septic tanks and produces fewer odours. When fully composted, the finished product is a dark, rich and nutritious compost that can safely be returned to the land. This is waste disposal as nature intended, but with a comfortable throne for your derriere.

But surely composting toilets smell bad, don't they?

This is the million dollar question and the one thing that people often find it most difficult to believe; a properly installed and maintained composting toilet has no odour at all. None! So it may even be one step ahead of many conventional toilets on that score. There are several features of a composting toilet that help to control the production of bad smells. For one thing, only anaerobic bacteria produce bad smells, and this can be avoided by ensuring a good supply of fresh air as most modern composting toilets do. Many have a ventilation system - either a fan or natural ventilation - that draws air down through the lid and into the storage drum. That way, the mixture remains full of oxygen and any smells

that are generated are sucked back into the system rather than escaping. In addition, the bulking agent that is added after each use forms an extra barrier between the waste and the air around it, until everything has been well broken down. The finished product has an earthy, mushroom-like smell, just like any other compost.



Why does EcoCamp Patagonia use composting toilets?

EcoCamp Patagonia is nestled into the monumental landscape at the heart of Torres del Paine National Park, in [Chile](#)'s wildly beautiful Patagonia. In order to provide upscale accommodation in the park, whilst staying faithful to the premise of preserving the untarnished surroundings, EcoCamp founders [Yerko Ivelic](#), [Javier Lopez](#) and [Nani Astorga](#) had to navigate their way through a whole host of ecological challenges. The result is a unique hotel that relies entirely on solar panels and water turbines for electricity, is a carbon neutral company and features the southernmost composting device in the world! EcoCamp Patagonia's facilities, which are also the first in the hotel industry in Chile, use state-of-the-art [Sun-Mar Centrex](#) toilets and come equipped with composting barrels that rotate to keep the air moving through and gentle heating to keep the composting process cooking even during the chilly winters. Guests at EcoCamp Patagonia can snuggle up in their [cosy domes](#) at night and sleep easy, safe in the knowledge that their visit will not detract from this unforgettable location and will help to preserve it for generations to come.

Perhaps you have another question about composting toilets that you've always wanted to ask? Or about waste disposal at EcoCamp Patagonia? Well now's your chance, let us know using the comments sections below!

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