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Composting Toilets For The Home

Written by: [NathanF](#) [Alternative Energy](#), [Top Headline](#) June 5, 2012 [4 Comments](#)

Composting is an extremely efficient way for home gardeners to recycle nutrients and dramatically lower their production of organic waste. However, even the most ardent compost enthusiasts seldom consider human waste as a potential source of natural fertilizer for their plants and trees. Clearly there are taboos at work that explain this oversight, but that does not change the fact that human waste makes an excellent raw material for compost, and any gardener worth his or her salt should at least consider trying to find a way to exploit this rich resource.

Needless to say, few are going to be willing to take a hands-on approach to collecting this particular type of organic material. Fortunately, compost toilets solve this problem by allowing human waste to be reprocessed into organic fertilizer without fuss or muss; as if by magic, a composting toilet can turn garbage into gardener's gold, and growers kept in the dark about the true origin of this compost would never have a clue that the clean, nutrient-rich mulch they were spreading around the roots of their tomato plants had actually started out as a substance with a much different aspect.



[The Best Fertilizer For Your Organic Garden Is Compost...](#)

Besides their ability to effectively recycle human waste, composting toilets are also great for those looking to cut down on their water consumption. About 90 percent of all the waste produced in a conventional toilet is made up of water, and a family of four could use as much as seventy gallons a day just from flushing. Since composting toilets do not require a transporting medium of any kind, however, the need for water-filled tanks and toilet bowls is eliminated, as is the need for pipes to carry anything away to septic tanks or sewer systems. So no matter how you slice it, for resource-conscious families living a simpler lifestyle, composting toilets could be a wise and sensible investment.

Despite their enthusiasm for the technology, though, most composting toilet advocates usually only recommend them for use in garages, barns, work studios, lakeside cabins, and other similar spaces that humans occupy on a part-time basis. The idea that a composting toilet could actually be placed right inside the home, as a full-time replacement for the more traditional type of john, would seem wildly inappropriate to many. But this opinion appears to be based on prejudice more than fact. While installing one or more compost toilets inside of a home may be the definition of out-of-the-box thinking, sometimes the most practical ideas in life are also the most unexpected.

The Ins and Outs of Composting Toilets

There are two different types of composting toilets available for home use. Self-contained units handle everything right on the spot, while centralized toilet systems pass waste through one-inch tubing to a composting set-up located some distance away from the toilet or toilets that feed into it. A centralized system costs more than a self-contained unit (from \$1,500 to \$2,300, as compared to \$1,000 to \$1,500 if purchased from [Sun-Mar](#), the most well-known manufacturer of composting toilets), but they will be the better option for those who have more than one bathroom in the house and need something that can collect and process waste produced in multiple locations.

In either type of set-up, waste is collected in a large rotating drum with a stainless steel screen at the bottom through which approximately half of the liquid content will be drained out into an evaporation chamber. Inside the drum, aerobic microbes will break down the waste and a bulking peat moss or peat moss/hemp stalk additive, and this process will continue until everything has been converted into oxidized salts. Throughout the compost production cycle, the drum must be rotated periodically to make sure its contents are thoroughly mixed, and whenever this processing chamber gets about half full, it will be time to start harvesting the composted material. To mix the drum, it must be turned clockwise, but to remove the compost, it will be turned in the opposite direction, which will cause the composted preparation to shake out

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into a finishing drawer at the bottom of the unit. After this, the collected material will need to be left to cure for about three to four weeks before it is ready to be removed and used.

The good thing about compost toilets is that they require very little maintenance or input once they are up and running. Just a cup of bulking additive per person added each day plus an occasional turn of the drum will generally be all that it takes to keep the composting process going smoothly once it has started. Setting up a compost toilet will require a little more care at the beginning, however, as the right amount of bulking material, microbe mix, and catalyzing enzymes will need to be added (as per manufacturer instructions) to make sure the composting process gets off on the right foot. It will usually take about six weeks for the first compost to be produced, but from that point on, the system should be largely self-sustaining.

Probably the biggest preconceived negative notion that people have about compost toilets is that they will inevitably smell bad. But as long as a good mix is maintained in the composting drum, the odors produced will be minimal, and any smells that might be present will be easily and efficiently carried away by the exhaust fan-aided built-in venting system.

A Model of Self-Sufficiency

Sun-Mar is the company that invented the composting system we have just described, and for those who want the best combination of affordability and quality, a Sun-Mar unit is still probably the best bet on the market. Other fine companies sell good working compost toilets as well, and although there may be some differences in the way units sold by other outfits operate, the basic principles of the system will remain the same. When shopping for a composting toilet, it is important to always look for the National Sanitation Foundation label, which signifies that the unit in question has been certified for quality and safety.

Composting toilets are self-sustaining ecologies that rely on a good balance of oxygen, moisture, heat, aerobic bacteria, and organic material to produce a form of natural fertilizer that is densely packed with the kind of valuable nutrients that plant life craves. In addition to their ability to produce wonderful compost, they are also ideal for use in an off-the-grid setting because they reduce water demand dramatically while taking the pressure off of septic tank systems that can contaminate ground water if they become overloaded. Despite the prejudices that people have against the idea, composting toilets can deliver an outstanding performance in just about any home setting, and while getting one can require a significant upfront investment, a composting toilet system can make an excellent addition to any homestead occupied by those who are working on achieving a maximum level of self-sufficiency in all aspects of their lives.

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Mostuafaa
June 22, 2012 at 11:50 pm

(Eric Grunden) writes: > We are beginning a program in our middle school where we will be training our > students to separate lunch waste in order to compost the organic leftovers. > If anyone out there has tried this at their school or has any advice (about > implementation, not composting), please send it my way. We have instituted this program in two of our branch schools, both with great

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