



## Frequently Asked Questions ABOUT COMPOSTING TOILETS

### **Why is a composting toilet a great solution for rural applications?**

Because composting toilets don't use water to process the waste. Composting toilets are especially good for drought conditions. Using a composting toilet prevents contamination of wells, rivers, lakes, or streams. Composting toilets are easy to operate and maintain and the resulting compost is good for the garden.

### **What is a composting toilet?**

A composting toilet is not an outhouse! It is a waterless way to handle human waste. It saves water from being soiled with waste and produces rich compost that can be returned to the earth.

In a composting toilet, human waste and toilet paper are covered with a "bulking agent" such as coir, peat, sawdust, or other similar matter. A container of the "bulking agent", with an appropriate sized scoop, is usually found beside the toilet. Covering your contribution with the "bulking agent" produces air gaps that permit aerobic bacteria to break down the product.

Human waste is about 90% water evaporation. Evaporation of this water is the essential work of the composting toilet. Some units include a fan to speed-up the evaporation process.

### **What is the environmental impact of using a composting toilet?**

Watershed Management Group says that by not flushing a typical water toilet, a family of three can save 10,950 gallons of water or 30 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. If properly composted, human waste can fertilize 15 to 30 square feet of crops and save up to 621 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> per year from not importing soil amendments.

### **Where can a composting toilet be installed?**

Composting toilets can be installed anywhere you need a toilet! They are popular in cottages, pool houses, boathouses, and garden sheds. They are used in residential applications where there is a water shortage or the owner wants to be water conscious. They can be installed instead of a septic system. They can be used in boats and RVs. They are also popular with the tiny house crowd.

### **Is a composting toilet yucky?**

No, it isn't yucky. Standing up and pouring sawdust over your deposit is no different than standing up and pushing the handle of a flush toilet. You never handle fresh waste when the unit is operated properly.

### **How much odor comes from a composting toilet?**

There's no odor from a composting toilet because air is being continuously drawn in through the unit and out through the vent stack. When working properly it will have a slight earthy smell. Aerobic bacteria break down the solids preventing the creation of methane or sewer gas.

### **Are they difficult to operate?**

Composting toilets are easy to operate. You just have to add a "bulking agent" such as, coir, peat, or sawdust after each use and periodically add an aerobic bacteria booster. Some models include a handle for turning the contents. Your dealer will provide specific instructions.

### **How often do you empty it?**

You never empty all the contents of the drum. Once a year you might empty some of the contents but you always leave behind enough to ensure aerobic bacteria is still available. Typically, for your seasonal cottage, you might empty some of the compost out of the drum once per year and for your year-round residence, once every few months. The compost is odourless, fluffy, and easy to handle.

**What do I do with the compost?**

Most people use the compost as an amendment for lawns, landscaping plants, and trees. Others are more comfortable that the composting process has broken down microbes enabling them to use the resulting compost in their vegetable gardens.

**Do I add any chemicals?**

No. The only thing you need to add is organic matter. Chemicals are dangerous to the composting process and are never added.

**What happens in the winter for seasonal applications?**

Nothing. The compost in the drum freezes, and no composting takes place. The freezing will not damage the system. To use the composting toilet during winter months or to have the composting action continued over the winter, the room with the toilet needs to be maintained at 13 degrees Celsius.

**How much electricity do they use?**

The electric units require hydro to power a fan (30 watts continuous) and a heating element that is thermostatically controlled. The average draw is about 150 watts or the equivalent of a light bulb depending on the size of the unit.

**Are there non-electric versions?**

Yes.

**How do you clean it?**

You clean the bowl as you would a regular toilet bowl but with only hot water, baking soda, and vinegar.

**Can I hook up more than one toilet in a residence?**

Yes. There are central systems where the main composting unit is located in the basement. Up to three toilets can be connected to it. The number of toilets is not as important as the number of people using the system.

**Is it ok to dispose of tampons, baby wipes, diaper liners, paper towels, etc. in the composting toilet?**

The only material that should be added to the composting toilet is human waste, toilet paper, coir, peat, sawdust, or other similar matter. We suggest you use recycled toilet paper to save trees and even more water.

**What about disposing of food waste or garden waste in the composting toilet?**

No. Adding other materials reduces the capacity of the toilet.

**Will a composting toilet meet my local building code?**

Local building codes do vary, so to be sure to check before buying. The Ontario Building code was updated in 2012 and implemented in 2014. "Drainless Composting Toilets" are allowed in all areas. (Some composting toilet brands, where there is high usage, separate the urine. These may require a drain into an approved greywater sump—compare the self-contained unit option and the safety drain option to decide which is the best for your situation.)

**What is the life expectancy?**

The life expectancy of a composting toilet unit is from 20 to 25 years.

**Are there certifications for consumers I should know about?**

Yes, the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) will only certify units that they have rigorously tested. They make sure that the toilet system can handle the stated capacity for an extended period plus an occasional overload. The NSF ensures that the toilet system gives off no offensive odours that the composted output has been demonstrated to meet required bacterial content levels, and that advertising, literature, and labelling are not misleading. For more information go to the National Sanitation Foundation's website and look under composting toilets.

**Why aren't more people in Canada using composting toilets?**

Some new water conscious community developments in Europe are not hooking up to the municipal system but instead are using composting toilets. For most of us in Canada, composting toilets are still a relatively new idea that is why we are sharing this information.

**Want to try one?**

Come and visit us at the Carp Ridge EcoWellness Centre. We have six of them! People wonder for a minute then find it is a great way to do your business!