



# Backyard Food Waste Digester

Food Waste Digesters are the easiest way to compost any type of kitchen scraps, including hard to manage kitchen waste like meat, breads, dairy, and processed foods. Since these food scraps often attract rodents, the enclosed, half-buried digester acts as a deterrent, keeping rodents out of your compost and away from your home. Digesters can also be used to compost pet waste if placed at least 10 feet away from a food garden or fruit-producing tree. Digesters work very well in small backyards when the goal of composting is waste diversion as opposed to soil building.

**Effort Scale:**

Easy	1	2	3	4	5	Hard
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**Put your food scraps in the cone and walk away!**

Digesters are an easy and effective way to compost food waste in your backyard, and can be purchased ready-made or easily improvised with a metal or plastic garbage can. While other methods of composting rely on a balance of materials and aeration or ‘turning’ to keep air in the pile, this method does not.



*Green Cone Food Waste Digester*

Instead, the digester uses heat from the sun, in combination with the naturally occurring macrobiotic and bacterial activity in the earth and the waste itself to circulate air and heat which develops a rapid decomposition process, producing a nutrient-rich leachate that is absorbed into the soil. The digester is an **aerobic process (with air)**.

An important distinction between digesters and other forms of composters is that digesters do not make finished compost and therefore do not need to be harvested. The leachate from your digester will still provide a valuable source of nutrients to all the plants surrounding it.

## How Do I Use a Digester?

- Install one or two digesters in a well-drained, sunny location in your yard. If possible, locate them away from out-buildings, shrubs, wood piles, or other rodent-friendly areas. If you choose, you can encircle your digester with flowers or edible plants to take advantage of the nutrient-rich leachate they generate. If you are composting pet waste, be sure to locate the digester at least 10 feet (3 metres) from your veggie garden and fruit bearing trees and plants as a precaution (do not add large quantities of cat litter).
- Add all of your kitchen waste to your digester(s). While your digester *can* compost meats scraps they

should not make up any more than 50% of the total volume of materials in your bin. In the unlikely event that odours become a problem, scatter a small amount of leaf mold, sawdust, or dolomite lime over each addition. Your kitchen waste should provide more than enough moisture for the bin, but if the material does appear dry, add a small amount of tepid water.

- For a household of 2-6 people, one digester should be sufficient. In optimal conditions, each digester can manage approximately 11 lbs of food scraps a week. However, if you are using digesters as your only composter and produce a large amount of kitchen waste, we recommend having two digesters to ensure that all kitchen waste is diverted from the garbage.
- The food waste digester is not designed to produce finished compost and is best left in position for up to five years. At this time the decision can be made to relocate it to another region of your garden, however this is not necessary if the digester is still working efficiently. If you do choose to harvest the contents of your digester, the partially decomposed matter removed should be dug (trenched) directly into a garden bed and allowed to finish composting. It is not advisable to harvest a digester that has been used for pet waste.
- The addition of a natural cereal-based accelerator powder containing effective microorganisms (EM) is recommended to encourage microbial activity in the Green Cone in the initial stages of use and throughout the winter if necessary. This may be applied directly to the food scraps before adding to the digester. Bio-bags may be added to a digester as long as they are corn-based and certified for home composting. Brands certified for commercial and industrial composting systems will impede the drainage system.

## Alternative Installation

If it is difficult to dig the required 2-foot hole for the lower portion of the food waste digester, or of garden space is very limited, there are several alternative methods of installation available. These include creating a raised bed around the unit or installing the Green Cone into a 40" plastic planter on a patio, deck or balcony. The Green Cone, even when full of waste, will not be unduly heavy, so a deck meant for people will have sufficient structural stability.



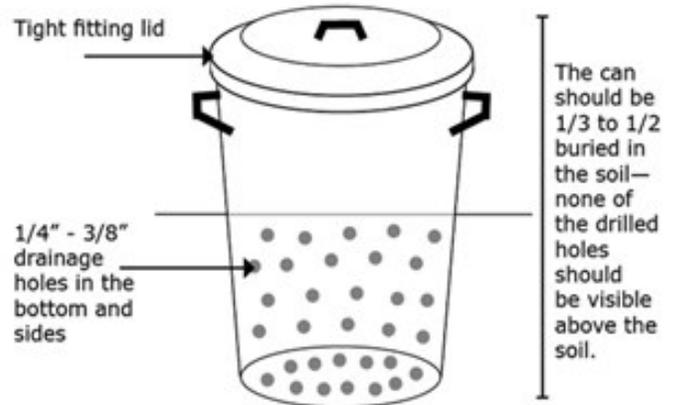
Drill 3/8" holes 2" apart through the bottom of the planter

Cover the bottom of the planter with 2" of drainage rock

Assemble the Green Cone as per instructions and fill area around basket with soil.

## Making a Food Waste Digester

You can make your own digester using a plastic or metal garbage can (a 32 gallon can works well). The can should have a tight-fitting lid. Drill or punch about 20 drain holes, 1/4 or 3/8 inch diameter, in the bottom of the can. Drill 20 more holes in the sides of the can, but only in the lower third, which will be covered by soil.



It is very important to make sure that the lid fits snugly on the can to keep raccoons and other pests out. Dig a hole at least 15 inches deep in a well-drained area of your yard and set the can into the hole. The can should be 1/3 to 1/2 buried in the soil—none of the holes you drilled should be visible above the soil. Once the hole is deep enough, push the soil back in around the sides. Follow the usage guidelines outlined in this fact sheet.

Source: *Building Your Own Composting Bin: Designs for Your Community*, California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) Last Revised: June 2006.

### Preventing Wildlife Interference:

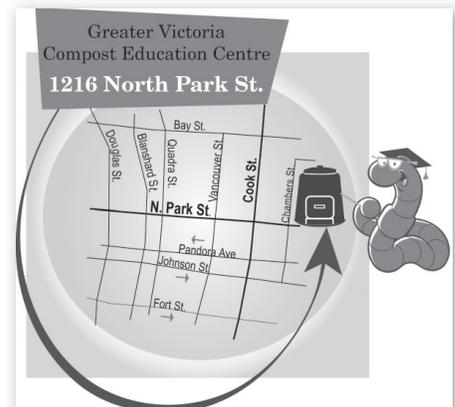
- ◆ In bear country, it is important to establish the environment in the digester before adding large amounts of meat, bones and oily food scraps—generally 4-6 weeks
- ◆ The initial use of accelerator powder should produce the desired 'mold blanket' on the top layer of food waste which is unappealing to animals
- ◆ Sprinkle cayenne pepper onto the top of the digester lid and around the base. Bears and rodents are repelled by the pepper and will likely leave the unit alone
- ◆ Wrap the lower basket of the digester with 1/4 inch wire mesh before burying in the ground and surround the unit with small boulders or bricks

## CONTACT US:

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We sell composting equipment, gardening guides and more. Call, e-mail, drop by or visit our web site.

Call the Compost Hotline:  
**(250)386-WORM**



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