

Making Ripples

The Scoop on Composting Toilets

by Amanda Bancroft

Perhaps the best way to help the environment is to stop pooping in drinkable water. 70% of our planet is water, 3% is freshwater, and 0.1% is drinkable. Our Beaver Lake water supply has been taxed by our increasing population. When properly maintained, composting toilets prevent pollution, conserve water, and recycle vital nutrients back into the earth. When we decided to install a composting toilet, I discovered dozens of options for us to choose from!

Since many readers told me they are trying to decide which kind of compost toilet to install, let's begin with how to choose a composting toilet, or dry toilet. There are several different models from Alaskan, Biolet, Sun-Mar, EcoTech Carousel, Envirolet, Phoenix, Vera Miljo, Bio-Sun, Soltran, and the popular Clivus Multrum to name a few.

For filler, crushed shells, houseplant trimmings, newspaper and even popcorn can be used successfully! You don't have to use sawdust as filler, and it can be detrimental if you're using a composter with a fan which could be clogged by fine dust particles. It all depends on which system you choose – make sure the particles can fit through a grate sifter if you're using one.

There are composting toilets like the Soltran that use solar power to break down their contents. Other designs use bacteria and time to do the job. Electrical composting toilets use a heater, fan, or other mechanical device. Be warned that electric toilets will cost more long-term because of their energy consumption, and mechanical parts will need replaced, but it may still be the best option for your circumstances. There are some toilets that incinerate the waste but run off non-renewable energy. Non-electrical options may come with a crank you must turn, buckets to be emptied, or pits to be raked – an unpleasant job, but some people don't mind this.

When purchasing or building a composting toilet, consider whether you want a self-contained or a centralized (remote) unit, manufactured or built yourself, with either batch or continuous composting processes. Also consider:

1. How many people and how regularly will the toilet be used?
2. Do you want to invest a lot or a little time for installation and maintenance?
3. What is your budget for both the initial purchase and yearly operation costs?
4. Do you have enough space to store and empty the compost?
5. Are you phobic of poop? If so, choose a forgiving, low-maintenance option.

There is freedom in variety here. You could use a toilet seat, bucket, and outdoor compost pile, or install a shiny new model from Norway. The main thing to consider is whether or not you can legally have a compost toilet, and how much effort you're willing to invest to maintain it.

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org