

# 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, since they do not produce finished compost.

## Effort Scale:

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

Digesters are an easy and effective way to compost food waste in your backyard. While other methods of composting rely on a balance of materials and aeration to work properly, this system does not.



Instead, the digester uses heat from the sun and microbial activity to develop 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. A minimum of 4-6 hours of direct sunlight will ensure successful green cone operation.
- If possible, locate your digester 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. However, 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 shrubs as a precaution. Adding some food scraps in addition to the pet waste will help the breakdown process. If you are composting cat waste, please note that cat litter cannot be added to the green cone. **\*Do not add compostable/ biodegradable bags**

- Add all of your kitchen waste to your digester(s). While your digester *can* compost meat scraps, some other kinds of food scraps should also be added. Like humans, digesters work best on a well-balanced diet! Digesters **cannot** take any carbon-based materials (i.e. paper towel, newspaper, any yard or garden waste).
- 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 2-4 people, one digester should be sufficient. In optimal conditions, each digester can manage approximately 13 lbs of food scraps a week. However, if you're using digesters as your only composter and produce a large amount of kitchen waste, you may need 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, if the digester is still working efficiently at this time, you may not need to relo-

cate it. 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 cereal-based accelerator powder containing natural bacteria is recommended to encourage microbial activity in the green cone, especially in the initial stages of use and through the winter if necessary. You will receive a package of accelerator powder with the purchase of a green cone and can purchase more packages at the Compost Education Centre if need be. We recommend using the green cone a few times before adding the accelerator to build up enough food scraps for the bacteria to go to work on.
- If the level of food scraps in your digester appears to not be decreasing but only getting higher, you can often help lower its level by :
  - pouring in hot (not boiling) water
  - stirring/poking it with a stick

### Raised Bed Installation

If the soil in your yard has insufficient drainage for green cone installation or if your soil is too rocky to allow you to dig the required two foot hole for the green cone basket, installing it in a raised bed (as seen in the photos below) can be a good alternative.



### Increasing the Pest Resistance of Your Green Cone

If you are especially concerned about rodents, you may wish to wrap the basket of your food digester in hardware cloth before installing it. This procedure is completely optional, but can help increase the pest resistance of your green cone.



**Materials needed:**

- a 2 ft. x 6 ft. piece of **1/4 inch**, 23 to 18 gauge hardware cloth
- a small roll of thin wire or zap straps
- a pair of wire cutters

1. Wrap the black basket with the hardware cloth, leaving about 12" hanging below, to be folded up on the bottom.
2. Use the zap straps or thin wire to secure hardware cloth to the basket where it meets, on the bottom and around the rim (just below it).
3. Cut the wire that comes above the rim in four or five radial slices so that it can be folded down flat to ground level to make an apron.
4. Secure the black and green cones to the baskets, put it in the hole you dug, fill in hole, and cover the wire apron with dirt. Finish the rest of the installation as per manufacturer's instructions.



1216 North Park St.  
 Victoria, BC V8T 1C9  
 250-386-9676  
 info@compost.bc.ca  
 www.compost.bc.ca  
 Wednesday - Saturday  
 10am-4pm

