

your cottage

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Composting toilets

COMPOSTING TOILETS, such as those made by Sun-Mar, are an increasingly popular and decidedly eco-friendly option for cottage living. They are effective biological converters and save significant amounts of water — some units require just one glass of water per flush. They're also ideal for an indoor toilet in a place where it's difficult to install water lines and sewer systems.

Composting toilets work by breaking down human waste and toilet paper through a process involving oxygen, moisture, organic material (such as peat moss), microbes (from rich top soil) and heat. The resulting compost can be used in your garden, but only to fertilize flowers or ornamentals; for safety, it should never be used

space, look for fibreglass or marine-grade stainless-steel units that can survive freezing temperatures without cracking.

Interestingly, composting toilets are no longer confined to rural areas. Pilot projects for urban use are now underway in several Canadian cities. In the Kitsilano area of Vancouver, the non-profit City Farmer environmental organization operates a composting toilet that's heated by a small electric coil and ventilated by a small fan. The resulting compost is used to fertilize ornamental plants on the roof of a garden shed. A public composting toilet in Vancouver's Strathcona Community Gardens has received media interest, as has an installation in Toronto's Dufferin Grove Park.

Some high-profile Canadians who use these systems at their cottages include John Fraser, Master of Massey College at the University of Toronto, and novelist Margaret Atwood. Former Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson describes herself as "totally and utterly an evangelist" for the 11-year-old composting throne employed at her two-acre Georgian Bay property, which has neither electricity nor hot water.

TIP

Check that the compost does not get too wet or cold, as that will halt the composting process.

to fertilize anything you will eat such as vegetables and fruit.

The sweet smell of success from a composting toilet is the absence of unpleasant aromas. To ensure this happens, look for toilets that create a partial vacuum, pulling in air to evaporate excess liquids. Electric models use a fan, while other types use a vent chimney. And insufficient oxygen can create odours. Models that use a hand-turned rotating drum ensure a proper oxygen supply. Add one cup of peat moss per person per day, and be sure to also use the toilet manufacturers' packages of helpful microbes.

If you're installing a toilet in an unheated

