

# questions / troubleshooting

## kitchen waste

Q: Should I put kitchen / vegetable waste down the compost loo?

A: No. Use a compost heap instead. It seems silly to mix material that definitely has no pathogens with material that might. vegetable waste can go on the compost heap and be used in the vegetable garden on any crops. Although the risk of pathogens remaining in finished compost from a compost toilet is tiny (see 'pathogens / hygiene'), we still recommend putting it on soft fruit / fruit trees / flower beds rather than the veg garden.

Also, veg scraps may have fly eggs on them, and flies are more attracted to the smell of rotten vegetables than faeces, believe it or not (see below).

## antibiotics

Q: Will people on antibiotics using the compost toilet affect the ability of bacteria to decompose the waste material?

A: No. A study by the Department of Microbiology at the Agricultural School of Norway found that only a tiny percentage of antibiotics taken by a person will be excreted, and the dilution effect of the materials in the toilet will mean that the beneficial bacteria will hardly be affected at all.

## smells

Q: What can I do if there are smells?

A: If your compost toilet smells unduly, then there is something wrong. If you have a vent, urine separation, a drain plus a sealed lid which is kept closed, and you add correct amounts of soak, then there shouldn't be any smells. If you have done all these things, and there are still smells, you can try the following:

- Check the drain; you can use a little drain rod from outside, and when you empty the chamber you can do it from the inside too.

- Maybe the vent isn't working properly: it shouldn't need a fan, but if you've tried everything else and there's still a smell, maybe it's best to install one.
- Check the pile isn't becoming too wet. Make sure people aren't weeing in it, and maybe get them to add two handfuls of soak instead of one for a while, and see if that solves the problem.
- Make sure the lid is sealed properly, and that it is always closed after use (see 'seat').
- Put a bowl of pot pourri in the room, and change it regularly.
- Put baking soda in the chamber.

## **critters**

Q: How do I get rid of red spider mites?

A: These were a problem for us for a while. They are tiny, barely visible, little red moving dots; they eat sawdust, and almost definitely come in on damp sawdust. Make sure that the sawdust that you bring in is dry.

We found that the only thing that killed them was the spray that we use to get rid of mites from our chickens. It's called red mite concentrate, and might be available at your local agricultural suppliers.

Q: What if I get flies?

A: Flies won't be attracted if you do everything right, as there won't be a smell. Also, you have to make sure that the lid is always closed when not in use, and then flies won't be able to get in. To be on the safe side, you can put some mesh (nylon net curtain will do, fixed with electrical tape) over the end of the drain, and the vent (although even if you don't, spiders will make webs in the vent and drain pipe and catch them anyway).

Don't put vegetable scraps in toilet because:

- They may have flies or eggs on them
- Flies are attracted to the smell of rotting vegetables more than they are attracted to faeces

If you do get flies:

- Install a fly-catcher if you haven't already installed one
- Use pyrethrum, derris or other organic insecticides
- As a very last resort, use fly-spray. I know they contain nasty chemicals, but if it means that otherwise you can't use the compost loo, then it just needs to be done. You shouldn't get to this point if you don't let them get in, but we had flies in the wheelie bin loo after we

changed them over – they had managed to get in while the bin was resting, or during the changeover. Once you have them, they can be difficult to get rid of. We tried derris, an insecticide block, and fly-paper, but it didn't get rid of them all. So as a last resort, we bought some fly-spray, opened the lid and gave the chamber a couple of sprays. It killed all the flies and what's more, they didn't come back. We still have the fly-spray a couple of years later, and haven't needed to use it again. If you use a spray, the amount involved will be so small relative to the size of the compost pile, that it won't affect the composting process at all.