

basic bucket toilet

The first toilet I made was when my family and I were living in a ramshackle cabin on a remote island in Canada. There was an outhouse down the garden, about 10m from the well, which didn't seem all that hygienic to us. Also, our boys were small (3, 5 and 6) and there were cougars around so we wanted a toilet in the house.

I made a simple commode with a 5 gallon bucket underneath, which we put in the shower room. Chris and the boys peed on a straw bale which we put outside the front door to limit the amount of urine going into the bucket and we made a compost heap from pallets and lined it thickly with straw.

We used sawdust as a cover material – softwood as that's what was growing everywhere. We piled it up on the ground, uncovered so that it would get lots of microbes and fungi in it to help with the composting process. We kept it in another 5 gallon bucket next to the toilet and it was usually slightly damp and smelling of the woodland floor.

I don't remember the toilet smelling bad, in fact the only person who ever said it smelled bad was my mother and I think that may have been more about expectations. One of the great things about that system was that you can solve any problem by removing the bucket and starting again.

One of the downsides is that someone has to empty the bucket. Although that wasn't a terrible job, it was another chore, and one which you want to be quite careful about to make sure everything stays hygienic. The compost heap wasn't particularly smelly either. On the few occasions when I could smell it I just added more sawdust and/or straw.

The straw bale did get very smelly – Chris tried moving it and it was too heavy so he made the mistake of cutting the string to take it out a bit at a time! It exploded open with a blast of ammonia. I think we should have put less urine on the one bale and used more, also we could have put them somewhere they could stay longer term so we didn't have to move them.

We need a small, simple toilet like this for one of our residents here – it's on the to do list!