



*Behold, the Digester,
framed by its cousin,
the Earth Machine*

Composting with Digesters: A system where anything goes!

By Caitlyn Vernon

Have you been frustrated not being able to compost all those items – meats, breads, dairy, and processed foods - that you can't put into your worm bin or backyard earth machine? Tired of sending your pet waste to the landfill and wondering what else you could do with it? We have an answer for you! It's called a Digester, also known as a Green Cone, and the Compost Education Centre will soon have them available.

Digesters are an easy way to compost any type of kitchen scrap. The important distinction between digesters and other forms of composters is that digesters don't need to be harvested. They can be, but they don't need to be. This means less work for you the composter, but on the other hand if you choose not to harvest it also means that you don't obtain a source of finished compost. Digesters are a good choice when the main goal of composting is simply waste diversion as opposed to soil building. If you harvest it or not, however, leachate from your digester will provide a valuable source of nutrients to all the plants surrounding it.

How do digesters work? Unlike other methods of composting that rely on aeration or 'turning' to keep air in the pile, digesters don't need to be 'turned.' The material you throw onto the top of the pile begins to break down through a process of aerobic (with air) decomposition. As more material is added, the materials on the bottom get buried and soon run out of air. The bacteria present at the bottom function anaerobically (without air) to further break down the material.

The anaerobic process retains nutrients much more effectively than aerobic decomposition, making leachate from your digester nutrient-rich. You can encircle your digester with ornamental plantings to take advantage of these leached nutrients. However, anaerobic composting also produces a number of by-products that can be detrimental to plant growth. If you choose to harvest your digester (remove the decomposed materials) it is important that you let them sit long enough before applying to your garden. It is recommended that anaerobic compost sit for at least 6 months before using it to eliminate any potential pathogens. For this reason we recommend that you use two digesters if you want to harvest the finished compost, so that one can be left to decompose while you add food scraps to the other.

If you are composting pet waste in your digester, *do not* use the finished compost anywhere you are growing edible food, due to concern with the spread of pathogens, and be sure to locate the digester far from your veggie garden and fruit bearing trees or plants so the leachate doesn't reach your food crops.

Is one digester enough? If you already have some other kind of compost (a worm bin or an earth machine) and are only using your digester for your "no-no's", one digester should be sufficient. But if you are using digesters as your only composter and you produce a fair amount of kitchen waste, we recommend having 2 digesters since they can fill up in 6-12 months. Once you have filled up the first, let it sit while you fill up the 2nd, and by the time the 2nd is full the first will have decomposed and will be ready to use again, no harvesting necessary.

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Join us at our Annual General Meeting!

This year's Annual General Meeting is coming up soon. Join us to hear from knowledgeable speakers, a chance to win fantastic door prizes, and the usual great conversation and refreshments to tantalize the palate. Learn about our new Black Gold Rush program on composting and climate change plus other great topics.

The AGM will again take place on site at the Compost Education Centre on

Sunday, April 15 from 2-4pm

If you have been a Compost Club member for a month or longer, you are eligible to vote for the Board of Directors and other motions. If you would like to nominate someone for the Board, please contact Sonya at 386-9676. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor.

LOUISE'S FAREWELL

As I head off to academia once again, I look backward with gratitude for five wonderful years at the Centre. I had the good luck to be living near the Centre in 2001, an avid gardener and worm composter, just finishing a semester in an environmental program and looking for a new position. As the schools educator, I became known as the "worm lady." Later I moved into additional responsibilities for volunteer and outreach coordination, making my job even more interesting and diverse.

I want to sincerely thank those who work for this organization in either paid or unpaid roles. The hardworking and cheerful Board meets monthly to set policy, which is carried out by a highly-motivated staff. Thanks to all of you that have added sparkle to my workdays and added to my knowledge. A special thanks goes out to the volunteers past and present who have donated their skills to help the cause of compost education, and for the pleasure of meeting you all.

Best of luck to the Compost Education Centre!



*Louise, the
"Worm Lady"
works with young
composters*

We gratefully acknowledge the core funding support that we receive from the CRD and the City of Victoria. Additional support is provided by the Fernwood Community Association and through the generosity of our Compost Club Members and the residents of Greater Victoria.

**Composting with Digesters:
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In addition to accepting pet waste and all the other “no-no’s” that you can’t regularly compost, another advantage of digesters is that they act as a deterrent to rodents because they are enclosed, half-buried and conical in shape with no corners for rodents to work through. Digesters can be easily improvised with a metal garbage can, or you can purchase one ready-made. For gardeners looking for nutrient-rich leachate or for anyone looking to divert more of your household kitchen waste away from the landfill, consider using a digester. The no-maintenance system makes compost management easy.

Digesters will be available for sale from the Compost Education Centre in March.

**COMPOST FOR OUR CLIMATE
AND COMMUNITY:**

An invitation to community groups

In the last newsletter we wrote about how composting can help reduce climate change, and encouraged everyone to join the Black Gold Rush! Now, for a limited time, we are offering subsidized compost bins and follow-up composting support to eligible community groups who would like to “Compost for our Climate and Community.”

Climate change is no longer an unknown and uncertain future; it is something that we are facing today. Community groups can take leadership in addressing this issue and make a difference to the future of their community by starting composting today! By composting your kitchen and yard waste you can reduce the release of greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

We would like to invite community groups to join us in our new program: Compost for our Climate and Community. For \$35, plus the cost of subsidized composting supplies, program involvement includes a composting and climate change workshop, access to subsidized composting supplies (while supplies last, some restrictions apply), materials for joining the Black Gold Rush Challenge to measure how your composting is having an impact on climate change, and follow-up composting support.

Participants will be selected through an application process. This program will be offered during 2007 only, so please apply early. To be eligible, you must be a registered charity, a non-profit, a cooperative, community centre, or community group (such as a church group, boys and girls club, neighbourhood association, etc.).

Further, your community group must be located within the Capital Regional District, have been in existence for at least one year, have a minimum of 5 members, and have demonstrated interest and dedication to continue composting over the long-term.

If your community group is interested in participating in this exciting project, please contact us at 386-WORM or info@compost.bc.ca and we will send you an application form.

Thank you to Vancity, the Capital Regional District and Environment Canada for making this program possible.



Dr. Wiggles has a New Look!

**Many thanks to
Kezia Wineberg
for creating our
new & improved
Dr. Wiggles.**

Vancity

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DISTRICT

Environmental Services



Environment
Canada

Environnement
Canada

Have you joined the **Black Gold Rush?**



Composting is one easy action we can all take in our own backyards to help reduce the impacts of climate change. Anyone can take the Black Gold Rush Challenge to keep

track of how much they reduce greenhouse gases by composting. There will be a quarterly prize draw for everyone who participates in the program and an awards ceremony to recognize creative composting efforts at the end of the program! Register for the Black Gold Rush online at www.compost.bc.ca/blackgold

Educators from the Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre are available to work with schools and community groups to discover how composting can reduce climate change. Contact us for more information on our Black Gold educational programs.

Organic Plant Sale

Prepare yourself for our 4th annual Organic Plant Sale! We will have another large selection of plants including annual and perennial vegetables, ornamentals, and medicinal and herbal plants. We hope to see you here!

When: Saturday, May 12th; 10 am – 2 pm

Where: Compost Ed Centre, 1216 North Park St.

Black Gold Rush Sponsor Profile:

The Black Gold Rush program would not be possible without the support of our generous sponsors. This season we would like to recognize the support of Camosun College's Environmental Technology and Work On-Campus Programs.



Camosun College gives students the opportunity to expand their learning and job experience through partnerships with community organizations. The Environmental Technology program, through the Work On-Campus Program, will be providing the Compost Education Centre with student support for the duration of the Black Gold Rush program. To date, we have had the opportunity to work with two talented Camosun College students: Natalie Cushing was instrumental in our early school program planning coordination and fundraising efforts, and currently Brian Tucker is helping to coordinate the launch of the Black Gold schools programs. These student positions provide an invaluable support to the project.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

M. Baldwin	E. Hogan	S. Johnson
C. Sacamano	D. Trapnell	L.C. Wicks

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Topic	Time	Cost
March 17	Cane Fruit Production	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
April 7	Composting Basics	11 am-1pm	Free
April 14	Anyone Can Grow Greens	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
April 15	Annual General Meeting	2-4pm	Free
April 21	Edible Landscaping	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
May 5	Composting Basics	11 am-1pm	Free
May 12	Organic Plant Sale	10am-2pm	Free admission
May 26	No Dig Veggie Gardening	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)

Full Events Schedule can be found on our website at www.compost.bc.ca

MUST PRE-REGISTER FOR WORKSHOPS BY CALLING 386-WORM OR EMAILING info@compost.bc.ca

SEEDS FOR SALE

We are happy to announce that once again we are carrying a wide selection of locally grown, organic vegetable seeds for sale. We have varieties from Rebecca's Garden, Stellar Seeds and Two Wings Farm. To purchase your seeds, drop by the Centre Wed-Sat between 10 and 4. Happy gardening!

THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the Summer issue is May 15th, 2007. Submissions to the newsletter can be sent to the Compost Education Centre. Unless otherwise noted, articles appearing in this newsletter may be reprinted only in other not-for-profit publications, with the credit given to the author (when named) and **THE LATEST DIRT**.

