



The Scoop on Pet Poop

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Pet waste producers featured in photo:

Maggie and Oddball

I love walking the Iron Horse Trail with my dogs every morning. The dappled sunlight dancing on the trail, the rustling leaves, trying to identify each different bird call and for me a special thrill is seeing a new bird that I have never seen before. This morning, what I thought was a new bird to add to my list was a bag of dog poop that someone had flung into a tree!

When I got home I looked up recommended ways to manage dog poop from the Region of Waterloo's website. Big surprise! 'Flinging' was not on the list! Also, 'letting it lie' is also not acceptable as bacteria, viruses and nutrients wash into our waterways and cause huge algae blooms and bacterial problems that can be a main reason for beach closures. Yuck!

The Region of Waterloo recommends the following pet waste management strategies:

1. Flush dog waste down the toilet, not cat waste as litter is problem for sewage treatment plants.
2. Wrap it in kraft paper and put it in the green bin.
3. Double plastic bag it and place in the garbage.
4. Bury it in the back yard.
5. Place it in a back yard waste digester.

Try Making Your Own Pet Waste Digester

In order to try to out the most environmentally responsible pet waste option, that uses no water or fossil fuels and produces useful compost, I decided to build a backyard pet waste digester. No rocket science here! My digester is a modified garbage can with a lid that is sunk into the ground.

1. Get a garbage can with a removable lid.
2. Cut out the bottom with a jigsaw.
3. Drill holes in a 6" grid pattern along the sides of the can.
4. Dig a hole in the ground just a little wider and shorter than the can.
5. Sink the can so that only the lid is showing.
6. Backfill between the earth and outside of the can with gravel or soil.
7. Add pet waste.
8. Add a septic starter to get going.

Tips for Success and Safety

1. Use a dedicated composter for pet waste only.
2. Use septic starter to speed the breakdown process.
3. Keep at least 2 metres from food waste composter.
4. Don't use plastic (even bio bags) in the composter.
5. Layer waste with wood chips or yard waste to reduce smell.
6. Wait 2 years before using compost.
7. Don't use on food gardens.

Dealing with Cat Waste

Cat waste can be digested successfully but there are a few things to remember:

1. Clay, sand and crystalline-based litters are not compatible with the backyard waste digester
2. Use biodegradable litters such as saw dust, commercially produced pine or cedar wood pellets, wheat or recycled paper litter

Happy Trails to You!

I am happy to report that my pet waste composter does not smell and is easy to use. My dogs are very happy to produce 'content' so that I will eventually have great free fertilizer for my lawn, trees and perennials beds. Now when we are out on the trail I gather the waste in pet waste bags and then empty them into the digester when I get home. I know some people who use a coffee cup or paper bag but I am not that brave. Everybody has to find a 'collection system' that they are comfortable with.

For more information about stormwater and well water protection through REEP Green Solutions check out www.reepgreen.ca/rain .

For additional waste management and water protection information see the Region's website at www.regionofwaterloo.ca

See you on the trail!

Cheryl.

