

## January 18, 2015 – SUMMARY AFTER “COMPOSTING BASICS” CLASS

- See also the slide presentation & references now posted at [www.heartwoodfolkschool.ca/composting-and-soil-building](http://www.heartwoodfolkschool.ca/composting-and-soil-building)

Here's a brief summary from Heartwood's January 17, 2015 "Composting Basics" class, attended by 65 Penderites! and taught by Alysha Punnett of the Compost Education Centre (lots more info in their Fact Sheets at [www.compost.bc.ca](http://www.compost.bc.ca)).

The first challenge is the hardest foods to break down (e.g. bones, meat, dairy, fat, oils) and/or the ones that are the most attractive to rodents such as mice, rats and racoons (e.g. starches and cooked food). One option is the Green Cone Digester. This is a heavy plastic unit about 4 ½ feet high, with a lower section dug 2 feet into the earth, where food breaks down into a leachate that feeds the plants around it. The Green Cone "digests" the above tough items, and also regular vegetable and fruit kitchen scraps, but it isn't intended to handle other organic waste like leaves or garden clippings. The Cone also doesn't create harvestable compost, and requires earth to dig into, a very sunny spot, and an accelerator bacteria powder. Pender Recycling is happy to sell you a Green Cone and the powder ([www.penderislandrecycling.com](http://www.penderislandrecycling.com)).

What if you don't have enough sun, or you're on bare rock? A Bokashi-type unit is another option for tough foods (bones, meat, etc.) and other kitchen scraps. This has a covered pail with holes in it, sitting inside another pail. You also need "Bokashi bran" with microorganisms that ferment your kitchen scraps, producing a leachate that you can drain off and dilute for plants, and then bury in your soil after a curing period, or add to your compost system for finishing. Our local gas station sells Bokashi units, or you could make your own. See [www.islandvittles.com](http://www.islandvittles.com) and the "Bokashi Composting" book at the Pender Library.

What if you really want to create compost for food growing, and you have kitchen scraps plus leaves, garden waste, etc.? Then there's another heavy plastic unit called an Earth Machine (also at Pender Recycling). You put green and brown organic waste in the top, and out the bottom comes compost. It is a static or slow composting method so not recommended for bones or meat, plus you shouldn't put in starches or cooked food to avoid attracting more rats or other vermin. Therefore, an Earth Machine is mostly for raw veggie or fruit scraps and garden/yard waste. However, some Penderites handle this by burning leftover bones and meat scraps in their wood stoves, feeding starches or cooked food scraps to their chickens or animals, and/or putting ¼" mesh around the Earth Machine to keep rodents away from tempting bits.

For food growers, there are MANY composting and soil-building options. Others of us might simply use the kitchen scraps pick-up service of the local Waste Management company. First we encourage you to check the references at [www.heartwoodfolkschool.ca/composting-and-soil-building](http://www.heartwoodfolkschool.ca/composting-and-soil-building), to see if you could do composting yourself, while also enriching Pender soil and supporting local food growing! A related option is neighbour cooperation, e.g. sharing a Green Cone or Earth Machine, and figuring it out together.