

“WHAT really put me off composting was one day when I opened the lid and there was this big rat looking at me,” says Neville Chun. The former manager of Wellington’s Zeniths Garden Centre, he had a chance to try most available composting systems. “I tried the rolling ones, and the three-level ones, but I could just never get it to work,” he confesses — and the rat was the last straw.

Neville’s now a convert to, and local seller of, the Bokashi Bucket system. These airtight, self-draining buckets come with a bag of sawdust/bran inoculated with a special mix of bacteria, yeasts and fungi called EM (effective micro-organisms).

EM work together to ferment kitchen waste without

odour, also suppressing harmful bacteria such as e-coli. As you fill the bucket, each layer of scraps is sprinkled with the EM mixture. When full, the bucket is put aside for a week or so to ferment, and can then be buried in the garden or added to a traditional compost bin. After a couple of weeks underground, fungi and worms have broken it down.

I’ve been trialling a bokashi bucket for a few weeks now and

I’ve been impressed by the lack of smell, even in hot weather. After sitting for two weeks, the full bucket smelled, only slightly, of yeasty vinegar. It was also great being able to add fish scraps, bread and chicken bones, unlike traditional compost. On the downside, there’s the initial investment (two buckets, at \$50 each, would be ideal) and the ongoing cost of buying the bokashi mix (\$8 every month or so). The airtight lid was sometimes fiddly, requiring two hands, but the micro-organisms need an anaerobic environment in which to work.

For people who find compost a bit smelly, especially for those in apartments, or with small gardens, a bokashi system has definite benefits over regular com-

For Bokashi

No smell – a big one for me over summer, as our area has a big fly population. You can put in bread, fish, meat bones, etc. Quick turnover – available to plants within weeks

Against Bokashi

Air-sealed lid on the bucket needs two hands – sometimes fiddly. Start up cost – ideally you need two buckets.



HANNAH ZWARTZ, ORGANICS

Buck it

» An alternative way of composting — the Bokashi Bucket system



posting. I’ll be carrying on with my one bucket, looking also for the claimed longterm benefit in the garden as the beneficial micro-organisms become established in the soil.

Digging holes for the waste won’t be a problem on my sandy soil or for those on clay. Neville says the fast breakdown process means that in a small garden you could get away with alternating between two holes. The liquid leachate also contains EM and can be used as fertiliser; sprinkled around chicken coops to reduce smells or poured into the septic tank to improve breakdown.

In Pusan, Korea, city authorities collect bokashi buckets kerbside from three

million households, significantly reducing landfill waste. In New Zealand, such a system has been successfully trialled by Christchurch City Council, which, along with several other South Island councils, offer ratepayers a \$15 voucher toward a composting or bokashi system. Bokashi is also being investigated as an option for Waiheke Island (where all rubbish has to be transported to the mainland).

As well as recycling food scraps, Neville says bokashi benefits the garden through improved fertility and saves money on fertiliser or compost. He estimates that an average family, filling a 15-litre bucket a week, could gain 700 kilograms of free garden fertiliser each year.

Bokashi in Japanese means “fermented organic matter”. Though Japanese farmers have used bokashi mixes for generations, the EM mix was developed by a Dr Higa of Okinawa, who experimented from 1968 till 1980 to find the optimal synergistic culture or “consortium” of bacteria, yeasts and fungi.

■ For more information visit www.bokashi.co.nz or contact Neville Chun, 04 977 0262 or neville@zeniths.co.nz



Left, a Bokashi Bucket won't stink out your kitchen. Above, after a week, food scraps are recognisable but fermented.

Pictures: HANNAH ZWARTZ