



**One of the most common concerns that new composters have is whether their compost bin will attract unwanted pests such as mice, rats and other undesirable visitors.**

**But don't fret! Prevention is the best medicine and the following information offers some ideas on how to reduce the chances of unwanted pests through some key measures...**

## Rodents

Pests, such as mice, rats and squirrels, are one of the most common concerns that arise amongst new composters. These tips describe how to prevent unwanted visitors from infiltrating your compost pile...

- 1** Do not put meat, bones, fats or dairy products into your compost bin. Although these would eventually decompose, the odour that these materials emit is very attractive to rodents.
- 2** Cover fresh food wastes thoroughly with soil or leaves. These materials absorb odours that attract pests and also help micro-organisms to get to the material faster.
- 3** Be sure to have a secure fitting lid attached to your compost bin.
- 4** Pest proof your bin. Inside the bin, secure a liner on the top, bottom and sides made of a heavy-gauge wire such as 1/4" hardware cloth or "aquamesh" with a staple gun with heavy-gauge staples. This will prevent any pests from burrowing under or through your bin to get at your pile. Chicken wire is not recommended, as it is not rodent proof.
- 5** Keep the pile well aerated. Turn the pile every three weeks (approximately) or three

to five times per season using a pitchfork, broom handle or garden claw. Aerating the pile also helps reduce odours that might otherwise attract pests.

- 6** If you live in bear country, do not add fruit peels, rinds or cores to your bin. Try anaerobic or vermicomposting indoors.

## Flies and Insects

First, it is important to realize that certain insects are vital to the compost process. Centipedes, spiders, beetles, and earthworms help break down the organic waste into smaller pieces for micro-organisms to digest.

Generally, the heat of the compost pile keeps the insect population in check. However, when a pile has not been turned or if the wrong materials are being added (i.e. dairy products or meat and bones), flies and insects can become a nuisance. To avoid this problem, make sure to aerate your compost pile every three weeks or three to five times a season.

Insects can also become a problem when food scraps are not being covered properly. Whenever a new layer of food scraps is added, cover it with a thin layer of dirt or leaves.

# A Composting Q&A



## CALL THE COMPOST INFOLINE

**Toll free:**  
**1 (866) 394-8880**  
**In Winnipeg**  
**call: 925-3777**

Need help getting started, or specific advice? We are here to answer all your composting questions!

### We can send you:

Free information on choosing a bin, plans for building a bin, information on specific topics such as compost tea, troubleshooting and vermicomposting.



The Compost Action Project is a service of Resource Conservation Manitoba (RCM), with thanks to the City of Winnipeg Water and Waste Department and Manitoba Conservation for financial support.

For further information on this project and RCM, please contact us at the following:

Toll-free: 1 (866) 394-8880

In Winnipeg: 925-3777

Fax: 1 (204) 942-4207

Email: [rcm@mb.sympatico.ca](mailto:rcm@mb.sympatico.ca)

Or visit us on the web at

[www.resourceconservation.mb.ca](http://www.resourceconservation.mb.ca)

### Pest-Proof your Bin

The best way to avoid unwanted guests is prevention! The first step is knowing what materials to avoid putting in your bin, and ensuring to cover food scraps every time you add them. If pests continue to visit, consider the following suggestions:

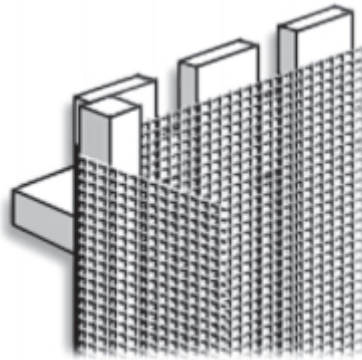
#### Plastic Bins

Plastic commercial bins are generally already pest-proof. However, there is a possibility that rodents can burrow underneath and access your bin from below. Putting 1/4" wire mesh liner or smaller below your bin can help prevent this from happening. Try a smaller gauge wire mesh if necessary.

#### Wooden Bins

If you own a wooden pallet bin or something similar, you will likely have to remove whatever compost you have in your bin in order to place a wire mesh liner underneath your composter. Placing the liner below the bin will prevent rodents from burrowing un-

derground to access your pile. On the outside of the bin, secure a 1/4" wire mesh with a heavy gauge staple gun. It is important not to use chicken wire, because the holes are too large and would allow rodents access.

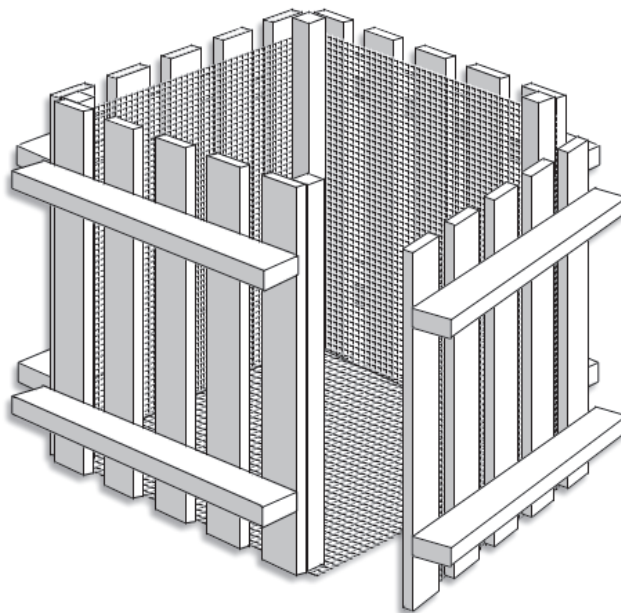


If you are buying a new wooden bin, look for ones that have wire mesh lining. If it does not, purchase and install a lining before you begin to compost.

#### Planning to build a Pest Proof bin?

The best pest-proof bins you can build are generally wooden bins with tight-fitting, secure lids and a wire mesh lining.

On the inside of the bin, secure a wire mesh liner on the top, bottom and sides such as 1/4" hardware cloth or "aquamesh". You can use a staple gun with heavy-gauge staples, or 2x2" posts screwed to the inside corners. This will prevent any pests from burrowing under or through you bin to get at your pile. Again, chicken wire is not recommended, as it is not rodent proof.



**An easily removable front can be held securely in place by four sets of hook and eye 'snibs'.**

**Attaching the mesh floor to a 2x2" fixed along the ground between the rails will provide a better seal for the 'gate'.**

**A simple frame with hardware cloth securely stapled edge-to-edge can be hinged to the back to form a lid.**