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# USING AN INSINKERATOR AS PART OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD FOOD WASTE MANAGEMENT

Have you got a food disposal unit in your kitchen? Or have you considered installing one? I had an idea about what one was, and this idea was firmly situated in a 1980's version of a very noisy machine, full of blades and installed by Yuppies in their white kitchens! Not something I would have ever considered and anyway, as an environmental advocate I compost all my food, don't I, and this is the best solution for food waste?

Well in actual reality, when I started to think about it, I DON'T compost *all* of my food waste. I don't compost meat scraps, I often don't throw the kids' lunch rubbish or the dinner vegie scraps, or soggy left over cereals in the compost bin. And if the little compost bin under the sink is full and I am too tired to go and chuck it out into the main compost bin, or the build-up of scraps on the sink top is all too much, I throw it all in the bin.

Then I was approached by Nuffnang to consider having an InSinkErator installed to find out how they work, and review the product. My initial reaction was as above, that it was not for me. But then I thought, why not investigate to find out more and in particular look at the environmental benefits, if any. After doing that, I decided it was a beneficial and useful component to a household's overall waste management, and went ahead. Here are my experiences and what I have discovered so far.



## Safety and Hygiene

Firstly I discovered that the food waste disposer has come a long way since the 1980s! There are in fact no blades and they are perfectly safe: the grinding action means there are no knives or blades. This was a plus to me.

They are very useful in particular if you are an entertainer and have lots of shared meals with friends and family, as using one stops rotting food smells, bacteria and insects that can grow if food waste is left in the kitchen, even when kept in a rubbish bin. Food waste disposers deal with food waste quickly and hygienically, leaving no mess and no smell, even in Australia's hot summer months.

Many people say a food waste disposer helps them to protect their investment in a new or renovated kitchen and it helps them feel confident about inviting their friends into the kitchen as it keeps things clean and sits discreetly out of sight under the kitchen sink.



## Environment

One of the major concerns I had, were the environmental benefits to using a food waste disposal unit and my immediate reaction was to think there were not any and that composting is the only way to go. When I delved into this, I found out that there is no overall 'right' answer when it comes to the environment and food disposal, which makes it tricky, and there seems to be an ongoing argument out there between the pro and anti food disposal unit groups.

This was a bit of a personal debate for me and one which, in the end, resulted in the idea of using a food disposal unit for some of our food waste, as being a balanced way to go for the following reasons:

- It has been estimated worldwide that food waste contributes 35-50% of all household generated waste. This waste is deposited in landfills and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions as it decomposes. As food waste is 70% water and there are no Australian standards for landfill liners or leachate management, 28% of waste ends up in unlined landfills and potentially increases the risk of groundwater contamination.
- Using food waste disposers can mean large savings for local councils: it means there's less to be collected and transported to rubbish sites, and there's less food waste ending up in landfill and contributing to methane and other greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, some local councils in the UK are actually paying householders to install a food waste disposer.
- Because un-burnt methane released into the atmosphere is a powerful greenhouse gas, 10% of our personal impact on the climate comes from the food waste we put in our rubbish bins that ends up decomposing under landfill.
- A food waste disposer grinds food waste into tiny particles that are easily flushed away. On average, it uses about as much water as a toilet flush a day.
- There are now some management systems that capture the sludge from our water waste and turn it into fertiliser, so food in the disposal system would end up as a useful product.
- Despite some moves to capture bio gas for energy, the decomposition of your food waste in landfill will likely result in more damaging greenhouse gas emissions, since the breakdown of your food waste may produce methane so quickly that it can't be captured.
- Some wastewater-treatment systems are actually looking for more food solids, since that will make the process of converting waste into energy more efficient. Food waste can also produce soil conditioner high in nitrogen, a vital source of ingredients for soil and valuable in farming.

The research tends to lean towards saying that under normal circumstances, you should go for composting most things if you can, but this is not always practical or possible and some things can not be composted for various reasons, such as meat scraps. And then to go ahead and use your food disposal unit if the following conditions are met:

- Your community isn't running low on water.
- You don't put anything that is greasy or fatty in the disposal.
- If possible, find out what your local water-treatment plant does with the waste so you understand this process better. The environmental benefits all depend on whether your landfill is harvesting the methane released from food in the landfill, or if your water treatment plant is harvesting sludge.



And if like many of us, you find yourself with a *lot* of food waste, try to work out why and reduce this waste in the first place. I know I often overbuy and this ends up in food rotting or expiring before we can eat or cook it, and that I often pack too much in the kid's lunch boxes. It is possible to avoid some food waste by looking at what you are throwing away and changing your practices. This experience has encouraged me to do this more and I intend to start examining our habits.



### My experience so far

Given the above, I agreed to go ahead and have the InSinkErator installed and I now have a garbage disposal unit! We have been testing it out over the past couple of weeks. We have put *all sorts* of food waste down there (most successfully!), to see how it would go and found the following:

- We have an older home and a single sink. Installation was a challenge, but the installer was a trooper and worked around all barriers to successfully install the unit, making me think it is probably possible to install in most situations.
- It is not that noisy unless you put an enormous t-bone steak down there! My hubby put one in there – NOT recommended people. It did take it in fact and munched it away, but it took a while and was noisy. My aim is also to minimize the water used in the process and the time the unit is turned on impacts this, so larger and harder items like this are better thrown out.
- It is really useful for the leftover soggy, soft and liquidy foods such as kids' breakfasts and lunches, and in these cases uses very little water and is super quick to get through. Like, when my Maxwell leaves a pile of soggy cornflakes as a gift for me, or there is a lovely mash of tuna and veggies in the bowl after one of my tuna bake dishes.
- Most of our fruit and vegetable waste still goes into the compost bin and then into our garden, but there are times when I have appreciated the InSinkErator for these scraps too, such as prepping dinner and putting some peelings straight in there in this very busy and tired time of the evening, and then using it for the leftover disposal after dinner.
- Generally it's the more liquidy-type stuff we are putting in there. Meat bones go into the bin, other than chicken which actually goes really well, quickly and reasonably quietly.



Overall, we feel that to minimize the impact of our food waste on the environment, when taking transport of any rubbish, methane production, water and power use, bio gases, sludge, etc etc etc into account (rubbish is such a complex thing!) and to make the best use of all of our waste systems at home, our plan is to use a range of methods to dispose of our food waste including:

1. **Minimizing our waste in the first place**
2. **Using the compost bin for most fruit and vegetables, in particular the stringy products such as corn, tea bags and celery, which are not recommended to go down the disposal unit**
3. **Throwing any greasy or fatty waste and red meat bones, in the bin**
4. **Using the Insinkerator for other food waste, in particular chicken, vegies we are not composting, and the liquid, soft and soggy foods**



It would be great to hear from you about how you manage your food waste. Do you have a food disposal unit? Are you composting? Or throwing your food waste into the bin? Or like us, a combination?

Overall we are happy we took the step to install the InSinkErator and now see it as a part of our home waste management systems.

To find out more information, including where you can purchase InSinkErator products, by visiting the website and Facebook page.

Helen

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