

## Responsible travel: Finding environmental solutions for campers and lodges

There is nothing quite like a sojourn in the African bush. One day in the bush is worth 10 on the beach! But whilst out enjoying these wonders how do campers, caravanners, and self-caterers administer the challenges presented with managing their food waste? It's a fact that food waste provides a scavenging opportunity thereby attracting wildlife which becomes a nuisance. And, unfortunately, that's not all as it also creates a dependency relationship between humans and wildlife.

By [Gavin Heron](#) 21 Feb 2017



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On-site composting is absolutely key for any game lodge, camper, hiker, caravanner or self-caterer. Not looking after this waste stream can be a disaster as was so well illustrated in [A Primates Memoir by Robert Sapolsky](#) by Robert Sapolsky. In his book, Sapolsky describes how the baboons he is studying start dying from TB after eating contaminated meat from the waste dump. Keeping waste in the open and in a waste area is not really an option. It will attract scavengers and no one wants to tangle with a 50kg spotted hyena. We have heard of these amazing animals sauntering into camp kitchens, grabbing a waste bin and then walking out with it firmly clamped in its jaws.

### Handling layers of food waste

Campers on the other hand either burn, bury or lug their food waste back home (the latter being a tedious task). Burying or burning your food waste also presents its own problems. We are simply moving the problem elsewhere. As burning never completely eliminates food waste, it also creates a foul-smelling environment. And then, of course, buried food waste can be dug up by animals.

Bokashi is a fantastic option as the process is to layer food waste in sealed bins. The microbes stop it from rotting and smelling. And, as it does not rot, the waste can be stored and then transported to a compost site outside of the reserve. Composting on-site requires a different strategy. Bokashi fermented food waste can be trenched, fed to composting earthworms, or mixed with other organic waste to make compost. In either case, an area needs to be secured behind a mesh fence which also needs to be secured 1m below ground.

to stop the diggers. While bokashi fermented food waste doesn't smell and won't attract scavengers it is better to be safe.



## Feed the soil

When visiting a biosphere we should endeavor to leave it as unsullied as possible. Camping is all about space and when embarking on your trip, the bokashi bin can be used to store your food. On location, collect all food waste (everything can go in including all cooked and uncooked meat, bones, dairy, onions, etc.) in a plastic bag and at the end of the day add this to the bokashi bin, layer with bokashi and seal. Do this daily until your trip is over and then take the bin back home with you. The container is simply filled with what was there when you started off – food (albeit decomposing, but at no additional weight). Once home it can either be added to a compost heap or dug into a hole under the drip line of a fruit tree – it will feed that tree with high value nutrients. You can also feed this food waste to composting earthworms.

Food waste has nutrients that we can feed to soil. So when dumping or disposing of food waste we are not only creating an environmental hazard, but we are also wasting nutrients which could go back to enriching the soil.

## Waste management



Composting in the bush can be a lot more interesting than composting in Sandton. Lodges can use composting machines which can be located outside and be adapted for solar power. A machine can process up to 5,000kg of food waste per month. The advantage of in-vessel composting is that it is a closed process and, therefore, resilient to scavenging activity (but probably not elephants). Processing rates can be controlled. And as it is off the ground, the risk of contaminating soil is eliminated. Best for the soil, for the animals and for the camp where it is located.

Additionally, these machines will process garden/landscape waste, wood ash (remember the bonfire), cardboard and egg trays. So not only will a camp reduce its food waste risks it will also be able to process additional waste generated by guests and staff. Processed compost can then be used in the camp landscape or even used to start a vegetable garden (again this will have to be located behind the fencing inside the camp and so reduce it being grazed by kudu, zebra, warthog or even hippo). Ultimately, though, forging a solid wet waste management process is a key responsibility for operators in eco-sensitive areas. Rotting food waste is bad for everyone - guests, animals, and staff.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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