

DAINTREE LIVING FACTSHEET

Waste Management

"Do without, reduce, reuse, repair, and if all else fails, recycle."

Douglas Shire Council implemented a comprehensive waste management policy in 2016. The policy includes provisions for a large range of household and industrial refuse including general household waste, recyclables, batteries, and chemical waste. Council processes all categories of waste at centralised transfer stations, where the material received is sorted down by category. Approximately 90% of it winds up as landfill; the 10% recyclable material is further separated by category (glass, paper, plastic, etc.) and shipped to Brisbane, where it is actually recycled. Although Council has set ambitious goals for both waste reduction and recycling, limiting factors like the infrequency of kerbside recyclables collection (once per fortnight), some of these goals may be achieved slowly, if at all.



Following are tips on how you can manage your household waste in a Daintree-friendly way AND reduce your household spending.

Related Factsheets

Gardening: *Rainforest garden challenges, soil nutrition, what to plant, fauna, water, and weeds.*

Toilet Systems: *Location, budget, power requirements, water supply, and maintenance for composting, waste water, and septic systems.*

Erosion: *Land clearing and habitat fragmentation, weather, wind and rain, regeneration.*

Grey water

A grey water system, including grease and food traps, needs to be installed to process wastewater from the kitchen, laundry and bathroom. Our native flora is sensitive to phosphates, so try NOT to use products that contain them. Note that septic system treatment will not remove phosphates.

You can collect grey water in a tank and use it to feed a dripper system for garden and fruit trees. However, you will need to filter it or the drippers will block very quickly. Your grey-water tank will need a 2" flushing valve at the bottom to allow easy clearing of sediment. You will need a suitable pump as well.

Organics (compost)

Everything organic - including food scraps, garden cuttings, (non-waxed) cardboard box bits, etc. - can be composted. While composting is an efficient use of your kitchen waste solids, we do NOT encourage the use of worm farms. You can make perfectly good compost without worms.

Why? Because we have almost no knowledge of our native worm fauna in the Daintree rainforest and their role in the local ecosystem. There are an estimated 160 Australian worm species and about 2000 species worldwide. And yet we are importing "weed worms", just as we have imported

exotic plants like Singapore daisy and other animals (the cane toad is notorious) which now threaten our local agriculture and native ecosystem.

"It's an ironic truth - the traits that make earthworms wonderful for gardens are the same ones that make them dangerous for forests. Earthworms stir up the soil, making nutrients more accessible to flowers and vegetables. But plants in forests have evolved other ways to get nutrients from the ground. When earthworms convert them into easier-to-access forms, it can favor invasive plants that later take over the understory. In the process they have also been known to endanger birds and orchids. They can be a threat to humans as well, collapsing irrigation ditches and speeding up erosion."

Source: *Earthworm Invaders, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center*

In fact, we suspect that the observed increase in mud in streams flowing from intact forest here in the Daintree after rain (when earlier accounts said that they ran clear) is due to the activity of introduced earthworms. The next day, there is just as much mud as the day before - typical of worm activity (worm casts are very easily broken down by rain). Of course, it all ends up on the reef.

Forest clearing

If you have had to cut down trees for your house pad and surrounding area, you can use the timber (if suitable) for floor supports and joists. There are actually locals who will come and mill the timber for you.

Glass, Plastics and Metals

Avoid using glass bottles and jars that can't be effectively reused. The energy needed to manufacture a new bottle or jar is often many, many times the energy contained in the contents and they often end up as road fill and land fill anyway. Some cask wines are even better than cheap bottled wines and vastly cheaper, and you aren't creating glass rubbish because you can compost the box and recycle the plastic bag.

E-Waste

If they still work, you can take old electronics to Lifeline or Animal Welfare in Cairns. Or dismantle the units and recycle what you can, such as the plastic cases. Cairns central waste depot (south end of Lyons Street) will accept e-waste for free.

Batteries

Lead acid batteries can be taken to the **Cow Bay Transfer Station**, Or they can be taken to **Qld Recyclers** on Federation Street in Cairns (off Scott St. just before Newell St), where they will pay you for the metal content. They pay for copper, brass/bronze scrap as well.

Other Rubbish

For other materials, try creative reuse, burning or, as a last resort, the Cow Bay Transfer Station.

Creative reuse:

- Porcelain and pottery: Smash it up and use as road base
- Boat propeller: Use as a door handle
- Outboard motor casing: Make into a mailbox (and impress your neighbours)

Burning when done properly reduces the lot to ash which you can add to the compost heap. Its important to have plenty of air coming through the bottom, and always light from the bottom NEVER from the top. Feed new material from the top once the fire is burning well. Have something to cover the incinerator when you are finished so a rainstorm doesn't wash your ash away. Old 44 gallon fuel drums (with the top and bottom removed) make excellent incinerators, you just need a grate (use old cast iron barbecue grills and perch them on cement blocks to give room for air flow and ash collection. You will also need a poker (a length of aluminium tube for instance) to stir a reluctant fire. Unless you have lots of dry material to begin with, don't burn damp stuff, and NEVER burn PVC plastics.

- *Austrop Foundation*
