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Worm Composting

Everything You Wanted To Know about Worms But Were Afraid to Ask

Worm composting systems are neat, easy and odorless, and work well for people living in apartments, condos or just about anywhere. This method of composting is also practical for people whose physical activity is limited or impaired. Busy redworms turn food scraps and plant trimmings into some of the best organic fertilizer on Earth, called **worm castings**. Composting with worms, also called **vermiculture**, is relatively effortless. Setting up the growing bin for the first time, and periodically harvesting the castings, is all that is required.

Getting Started

For a household of two persons, a bin two feet square and 8 to 12 inches deep will suffice. The bin can be made of any substance. It must be kept dark inside and must have a lid to keep out rodents and flies. The bottom should have holes spaced at about 3 inches for drainage and ventilation.

Where To Put the Worm Bin

Locate your bin where it will get good air circulation and will not freeze or overheat. Worms prefer 55 - 75 degrees F. If the bin is placed outside, be sure to locate it in full shade.

Making A Bed for the Worms

The first step in setting up a

worm bin is to prepare the bedding material. In nature, redworms are found among masses of decaying vegetation such as fallen leaves, manure piles, or under rotten logs. A suitable common medium is hand-shredded newspaper moistened to about the dampness of a wrung-out sponge. Fill the bin 3/4 full and fluff up the shreds. Sprinkle the bedding with a few handfuls of soil. **DO NOT** use glossy paper as from magazines; the paper must be water absorbent.

Worms For Your Bin

Compost worms are often called **red worms** or **red wigglers**. They are different from earthworms and night-crawlers that live underground. Ask us about purchasing these.

Maintenance and Feeding

Apply about one quart of food scraps per square foot per week. Worms eat fruit and vegetable scraps, pasta, bread, and other kitchen leftovers. They love coffee grounds and filters, tea bags, paper towels, and napkins. Egg shells are a real favorite which aid their digestion of food. **DO NOT** add animal products such as cheese, oil, bones, and meat. To eliminate fruit flies, place a small jar with about an inch of vinegar in the corner of the bin, being careful not to spill any of the vinegar in the bin. [continued]

Please See Reverse

Worm Composting

Recycle Your Food Scraps Indoors Or Out

Maintenance and Feeding [continued]

Add fresh bedding every 1 to 3 months. Always keep a 4 to 6-inch layer of fresh bedding over the worms and food in the bin. Plastic bins may require the addition of dry paper to maintain proper moisture content (about as a wrung-out sponge); wooden bins may require the addition of water occasionally to maintain this wetness.

Harvesting and Using Worm Compost

Every 2 - 3 months, move the contents of the bin to one side, place fresh bedding and a handful of soil in the empty space, and bury food there for a month or two. Harvest the other side after the worms have migrated to the new food and bedding.

Using Worm Compost

Use of worm compost will help your plants thrive by adding nutrients and humus to the soil. Use as a mulch around indoor or outdoor plants, or blend into potting mix or garden soil.

Other Creatures in the Worm Bin

Typically other decomposing organisms will be found in the worm bin. Tiny white worms called **Echytraeids** are common and OK. **Springtails** eat molds and produce humus; they appear as a sprinkling of tiny white specs. **Millipedes, sow bugs, slugs, snails, pill bugs** and **beetles** are other common beneficial composters found in worm boxes. **Ants**, while also benevolent, can be controlled by a barrier of Tanglefoot along the base of the box.

Worm Bin Problems

Problem	Causes	Solutions
Bin attracts flies and/or smells bad	Food exposed and/or overfeeding	Add layer of bedding and/or feed worms less
	Improper food scraps added	Remove animal products, meat bones
Worms are dying	Food and bedding all eaten	Harvest compost, add fresh bedding and food
	Too dry/wet	Add water until damp or add bedding to absorb excess moisture
	Extreme temperatures	Move bin to cooler or warmer area

Benefits of Compost

- Increase moisture and nutrient retention of sandy soils
- Improved aeration and root penetration
- Reduced crusting of soil surface
- Small amounts of nutrients added
- Increased number of beneficial soil organisms which suppress harmful soil organisms