



Worm Composting

Getting Started

Choose a Bin

Buy a bin, or build one out of wood, plastic, an old dresser drawer, shipping crate, or barrel.

What Kind of Bin?

Your bin needs to be 12"-18" deep, have a snug fitting lid, and small holes in the bottom or sides for ventilation. To help keep pests, such as fruit flies, out, the holes need to be 1/4" or smaller. The rule of thumb for bin size is two square feet of surface area per person. An average two-person house would need a bin about 2'x2' = 4 square feet, or two bins that are 1'x2' = 2 square feet each.



Pick a Place

Locate your bin where it will not freeze or overheat in a pantry, kitchen corner, laundry room, garage, basement, patio, deck, or in your garden. Avoid direct exposure to the sun.

Make a Worm Bed



Worms like to live under lots of moist paper or leaves. This helps keep them cool and moist, gives them fiber to eat, and prevents fruit flies from getting to the food. To make your worm bed, tear black and white newspapers into one-inch strips, fluff them up, then moisten them so they are as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Fill your bin 3/4" full with this moist "bedding." Shredded, corrugated cardboard, leaves, compost, sawdust and straw can also be added in as bedding. Sprinkle bedding with a few handfuls of soil. Do not use glossy paper or magazines.

Adopt Some Worms

Compost worms are often called "red worms" or "red wigglers." They are different from nightcrawlers who live underground in deep tunnels. You can find red worms in an old compost pile, get them from a friend's worm bin, or buy them from worm farms. Start with one or two pounds, or two nice big handfuls.

Feed Worms Their First Meal

Start your worms off with about a quart of fruit and vegetable trimmings. Then leave them alone for a couple of weeks while they get used to their new home.

Maintaining a Worm Bin



Feed your worms about a quart (one pound) of food scraps per square foot of surface area in your bin per week. To avoid [Common Problems](#), like fruit flies and odors, always bury food under the bedding. Don't dump and run! Be sensitive to over feeding. If the bin starts to smell or food isn't breaking down quickly, give your worms a break and feed them less food. Worms reproduce quickly, so they should be able to eat all your food if there's enough space and you increase the amount of food gradually.

Do Compost

- All fruit & vegetable trimmings
- Coffee grounds & filters
- Tea bags
- Citrus rinds
- Rinsed-out, crushed eggshells
- Used paper towels
- Soft green plant trimmings

Don't Compost

- Meat, bones or fish
- Dairy products or grease
- Grains, beans or breads
- Dog, cat or bird feces
- Sawdust from plywood/treated wood
- Woody prunings (in closed-air systems, worm bins, or underground)

Add fresh bedding as needed, at least once a month. Always keep a 4" to 6" layer of fresh bedding over the worms and food in your bin.

Keep bedding moist, like a wrung-out sponge. In a plastic bin, add dry bedding to absorb excess moisture. Wooden bins may require adding water occasionally.

Harvest worm castings periodically. Small bins may need it every 3 - 6 months. Larger bins will need it every 6 - 12 months.

Harvesting A Worm Bin

Harvest worm compost at least once each year to keep your worms healthy. You can start harvesting 2-3 months after you set up your bin.

Quick 'n Easy Simply reach in and scoop out the brown crumbly compost, worms and all.

Migration Move the contents of your bin to one side, place fresh bedding and a small handful of soil in the empty space. Bury all added food scraps there for a month or two. Harvest the other side after most of the worms have migrated to the new food and bedding.

Straining Put the contents of your worm bin (worms, food, bedding, and all!) into a colander over a 5 gallon bucket. Gently pour water through the colander. Worm castings will dissolve into the water, creating compost tea. Put worms, uneaten food and bedding back in the worm box.

Piles, or how to keep kids busy all afternoon Spread a tarp out in a bright area and avoid direct sun. Take the worm box contents and create small mounds over the entire tarp. After a few minutes, worms will migrate away from the sun and to the bottom of the piles. Scrape the top layer of castings off, returning uneaten material or bedding to the worm box. When you're down to a pile of wiggling worms, place them back in the box and move onto the next pile.

Using Worm Compost

Worm "casts" or compost will help your plants thrive by adding nutrients and humus to the soil. Sprinkle a 1/4" to 1" layer at the base of indoor or outdoor plants or blend no more than 20% worm compost into potting mix or garden soil. Digging worm compost into garden beds is another great way to use worm compost, particularly if you're adding woody compost at the same time.