

Year Round Gardening

Vermicomposting: Putting Worms to Work

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Vermicomposting, is simply using worms to recycle food scraps and other organic material into a valuable soil amendment called vermicompost or worm castings. Setting up a worm bin is easy. All your worms need is moisture, air, food, darkness, and temperatures between 55 and 70°F.

Worm boxes can be purchased or made. The box must provide darkness, ventilation and holes in the bottom for drainage. You will need a container below to catch the worm tea that may drain from bin. Plastic storage containers are light weight & convenient for worm boxes.

The bedding must retain both moisture and air while providing a place for the worms to live. Newspaper strips or corrugated cardboard work well. Prepare your bedding by putting it in a separate, large container. Add water until it covers the bedding. Before transferring the bedding to your worm box, squeeze the water out from the bedding. It should feel like a well-wrung washcloth. Fill your worm box two-thirds full with the prepared bedding.



Start with a ½ pound of red wigglers (*Eisenia foetida*) for a 2' x 2' x 8" box. Scatter the worms over the top of the bedding material. They will work their way down into the bedding to get away from the light.

The kitchen waste fed to worms should include vegetable and fruit waste, crushed egg shells, coffee grounds, and tea bags. Avoid any meat, oils or dairy products. Start with approximately 1-1½ cups total per week for your ½ pound of worms. Feed your worms every 3-4 days by spreading scraps in a thin layer on top of the bedding in a different spot each time to move the "herd". Do not stir the bedding and food as this will create a

“compost pile” effect, heating up the box and killing your worms. If you notice odors, cut back on the amount of food.

As time progresses, you will notice less bedding and more compost in your box. After 3-5 months when your box is filled with compost and very little bedding, it is time to harvest the box. Stop adding new food to the box for two weeks. Then push all contents to one side of the box, removing large pieces of undecomposed food or newspaper. Put fresh bedding and food scraps in empty side of the box. Continue burying food scraps only in freshly bedded half. After 2-3 weeks, the worms will move over to the new bedding, leaving the compost behind. Harvest the compost and replace it with fresh bedding.

Your vermicompost is now a nutrient-rich amendment, ready for direct application to plants both indoors and outdoors.

Learn more about composting with worms by reading *Success Tips for Vermicomposting* at <https://sam.extension.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/05/vermicompost.pdf>

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research-based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by visiting ask.extension.org any time day or night. Follow the El Paso County Master Gardeners on www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC/