

Worm Composting

- ~ Most fun! More time & effort
- ~ Very compact—indoors or out
- ~ Produces small amounts of vermicompost

GETTING STARTED

1. 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 10"- 16" deep, have a snug-fitting lid, and holes in the bottom or sides for ventilation. To keep rodents 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' x 2' = 4 sq. feet, or two bins that are 1' x 2' = 2 sq. feet each.

2. 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.

3. 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 & 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.

4. Adopt some worms. Compost worms are often called "red worms" or "red wigglers."

They are different from earthworms and night-crawlers who live underground. You can find red worms in an old compost pile, get them from a friend's worm bin, or buy them from a source listed on the back of this brochure. Start with one half to one pound, or two nice big handfuls.



5. Feed worms their first meal. Start your worms off with about a quart of fruit and vegetable trimmings (see "Do's & Don'ts" section). Then leave them alone for a couple of weeks while they get used to their new home.



MAINTAINING YOUR 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 fruit flies and odors, always bury food under the bedding. Don't dump and run!

Add fresh bedding every 1-3 months. Always keep a 4" to 6" layer of fresh bedding over the worms and food in your bin.

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

HARVESTING & USING WORM COMPOST

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. Simply reach in and scoop out the brown crumbly compost, worms and all. You can also move the contents of your 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 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.

WORM-BIN TROUBLESHOOTING

PROBLEMS	CAUSES	SOLUTIONS
Worms are dying	Food and bedding all eaten	Harvest compost, add fresh bedding and food
	Too dry	Add water until slightly damp
	Extreme temperatures	Move bin so temp. is between 40 - 80° F
Bin attracts flies and/or smells bad	Food exposed/overfeeding	Add 4" - 6" layer of bedding & stop feeding for 2-3 weeks
	See compost's (Do's and Don't's)	Remove meat, pet feces, etc.
Sowbugs, beetles in bin	These are good for your worm compost!	

Why compost?

Composting is nature's way of recycling. It is a satisfying way to turn your fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil conditioner.



COMPOSTING:

- ~ **Saves you money** by lowering garbage bills and replacing store-bought soil conditioners.
- ~ **Helps garden and house plants** by improving the fertility and health of your soil.
- ~ **Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- ~ **Benefits the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfills.

COMPOST DO'S AND DON'TS:

DO COMPOST:

All fruit & vegetable trimmings
Coffee grounds & filters
Tea bags
Eggshells
Used paper towels
Soft green plant trimmings

DON'T COMPOST:

Meat, bones & fish
Dairy products & grease
Grains, beans & breads
Dog, cat & bird feces
Sawdust from plywood or treated wood
Woody prunings (in worm bins)



Remember...composting fruit & vegetable trimmings requires special care. To avoid rodents, flies and bad odors just follow the simple guidelines in this brochure. Use a container with a lid, a floor, and no holes bigger than 1/4 inch, or bury food scraps at least one foot underground.

Resources

FREE WORKSHOPS

Pre-registration required for our composting workshops. See a current schedule on our website www.ReduceWaste.org.

THE ROTLINE 408-918-4640 answers compost questions.

BOOKS

Rodale Book Of Composting, 1992 G. Gershuny
Saint Martin's Press, New York, NY, 278 pp.

Worms Eat My Garbage, 1997 Mary Appelhof
Flowers Press, Kalamazoo, MI 162 pp. Second Edition

WORM SOURCES

Sonoma Valley Worm Farm 800-447-6996
www.ciwmb.ca.gov/organics/worms
Blue Ridge Vermiculture - San Jose, CA
www.theWormDude.com
email: theWormDude@Comcast.net
or call 408-227-5267

ABOUT THE MASTER COMPOSTER PROGRAM

The Home Composting Education Program teaches a ten week training course in backyard composting to interested volunteers once a year. Training consists of approximately 50 hours of classroom and hands-on instruction. Volunteers agree to give back 50 hours of volunteer service in the form of composting workshops and other educational outreach. For more information contact:

County of Santa Clara
Home Composting Education Program
1553 Berger Drive, Building 1,
San Jose, CA 95112
408-918-4640
compost@aem.sccgov.org

Worm Composting

And other methods for recycling fruit & vegetable trimmings



Recycle your food scraps indoors or out.
It's fun! It's smart! It's recycling!

Santa Clara County
Home Composting Education Program

408-918-4640



Brought to you by the Recycling and Waste Reduction Commission and your City

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