

# Composting with Worms



Vermicomposting is the practice of recycling organic matter by feeding it to worms.

Not all worms can be used for vermicomposting; the most commonly used worm is *Eisenia foetida*, aka the red wiggler. These worms can eat up to 50% of their own body weight in organic matter per day and double their population every 3 to 4 months.

Worm compost is rich in nutrients and microorganisms and makes a great fertilizer for house and garden plants.

There are lots of good reasons to compost with worms:

- It's easy
- It's fun
- Worm bins take up very little space
- It can be done indoors, so even people without yards can do it
- It can be done year-round
- It diverts waste from landfills, thus helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions



Little worm, big appetite!

Flyer produced by:



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For more information on worm composting, we recommend the following links:

<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/vermi.htm>

<http://www.wormdigest.org/>

[http://www.howtocompost.org/info/info\\_wormfaq.asp](http://www.howtocompost.org/info/info_wormfaq.asp)

# Vermicomposting in Six Easy Steps

1. **Acquire a bin.** Instructions for purchasing or building your own can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/wormbin> (PDF).
2. **Prepare the bedding.** Instead of soil, composting red worms live in moist newspaper bedding. Like soil, newspaper strips provide air, water, and food for the worms.
  - Using about 50 pages, tear newspaper into 1/2" to 1" strips. Avoid using colored print, which may be toxic to the worms. Place newspaper strips into a large plastic garbage bag or container. Add water until bedding feels like a damp sponge, moist but not dripping. Add dry strips if it gets too wet.
  - Add the strips to the bin, making sure bedding is fluffy (not packed down) to provide air for the worms. Bin should be 3/4 full of wet newspaper strips.
  - Sprinkle 2-4 cups of soil in bin, which introduces beneficial microorganisms. Gritty soil particles also aids the worms' digestive process. Potting soil or soil from outdoors is fine.
3. **Add your worms.** Special composting worms can be purchased online or at some specialty stores. A pound of worms is plenty to start with for the average family.
4. **Feed the worms.** A balanced diet includes fruit and vegetable scraps that would normally be thrown away (such as peels, rinds, and cores) along with eggshells (crushed), tea bags, coffee grinds and filters, breads/grains/cereals, and wood ash from the fireplace (in small amounts). Limit the amount of citrus fruits and onion skins that you place in the bin. Do not add meats, bones, oils, or dairy products.
  - Bury food scraps in the bin. Lift up bedding, add food scraps, then cover food with bedding.
  - To help the worms eat your scraps more quickly, cut into small pieces—the smaller, the better.
  - Measure the amount of food. For a new bin, start with just one pound. After a week or so, you can start feeding worms approximately 3 times their weight per week.
  - Monitor the bin every week to see if the worms are eating all the food. Adjust feeding levels accordingly.
5. **Cover the worms.** Place a full sheet of dry newspaper, burlap, or cardboard on top of the bedding. This will help maintain the



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moisture balance, keep any possible odors in the bin, and help prevent fruit flies from making a home in the bin. Replace this sheet frequently if fruit flies are present, or if bin gets too wet. Cover the bin with a lid made of plastic, plywood or cloth. Leave the lid ajar or drill holes into the bin so the worms get some air. Place the bin away from windows and heaters, out of the elements, ideally where the temperature stays between 60-80°F.

6. **Keep worms happy!** Feed them about once a week. If bedding dries up, spray with water. If bedding gets too wet, add dry newspaper strips. Fluff up bedding once a week so the worms get enough air.