Using Your Compost

Worm compost is more concentrated than most other composts because of the way worms digest food waste: they break food down in their digestive tracts into simple, readily-available plant nutrients. Use the castings sparingly for best results.

Mulching and Amending Soil
To mulch with worm compost, apply a one-inch layer to the soil around plants. Be sure the worm compost is not piled against plant stems. To amend soil, worm compost can be spread one-half to two inches thick over garden soil and mixed in before planting, or mixed into the bottom of seeding trenches or transplanting holes.

For House-plants
Sprinkle worm compost around the base of plants to fertilize. Each time you water, plant nutrients will seep into the soil.

In Potting Mixes
For healthy seedlings, mix one part worm compost with three parts potting mix or three parts sand and soil combined. Perlite and vermiculite are also good ingredients to add.

For More Information

Books


Educational Assistance
Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, Environmental Education Office, 707 North Robinson, Oklahoma City, OK 73102, 405/702-5100

Central Oklahoma Metropolitan Environmental Association

Canadian County Solid Waste Disposal Authority

Let Worms Eat Your Garbage!

WORM COMPOSTING

Let worms eat your garbage! They will happily turn it into some of the best fertilizer on Earth - worm compost, otherwise known as worm castings or vermicompost. Vermicompost is a fascinating, fun and easy way to recycle your organic kitchen wastes. It requires very little work, produces no offensive odors and helps plants thrive. Composting with worms saves money on garbage bills, improves the fertility and water-holding capacity of garden soil, benefits the environment by recycling valuable organic materials, and helps solve the crisis of overflowing landfills.

Troubleshooting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worms are dying</td>
<td>Not enough food</td>
<td>Bury food into bedding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too dry</td>
<td>Moisten until slightly damp</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too wet</td>
<td>Add bedding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too hot</td>
<td>Put in shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedding is eaten</td>
<td>Harvest worm compost,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>add fresh bedding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bin smells rotten</td>
<td>Not enough air circulation</td>
<td>Add dry bedding under and over worms, do not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and/or attracts flies</td>
<td>(too wet)</td>
<td>feed for 2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-compostables present</td>
<td>Remove meat, pet feces, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food exposed</td>
<td>Secure lid, cover food scraps with bedding,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cover worms and bedding with a sheet of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>plastic or carpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat thinks bin is a</td>
<td>No lid on bin</td>
<td>Remove cat feces, keep lid on bin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>litter box</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Worm Bins

Your bin only needs to be 8”-14” deep, since compost worms are surface feeders. You can use a wash tub, a dish pan, a used shipping crate, or a commercial worm bin. Just be sure your bin has a lid to keep out flies and rodents, and holes in the bottom (1/4 inch or smaller) for ventilation and drainage.

Worms

The best kind of worms for composting are “red worms,” or “red wigglers.” They are often found in old compost piles, but are different from the earthworms you normally find in the ground. Their scientific names are Eisenia fetida and Lumbricus rubellus. These worms have a big appetite, reproduce quickly, and thrive in confinement. They can eat more than their own weight in food everyday! Common earthworms and nightcrawlers don’t survive well in bins, since they normally live under the soil surface. When purchasing red worms, one pound is all you need to get started.

Bedding Materials

The compost worm’s natural habitat is in piles of fallen leaves or manure above the soil surface. These materials can be used for bedding, as can partially finished compost or chopped straw. Black and white newspaper is the most readily available and easy-to-use bedding material. Tear it into strips about one inch wide and moisten them to the point as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Cow or horse manure can be used to lighten bedding and absorb excess moisture. A handful or two of soil, ground limestone or well-crushed egg shells every few months are good for providing grit and calcium. Fill your bin with bedding, water until evenly damp, toss in a few handfuls of soil, and you’re ready to add the worms and food. Over time, the bedding and food are eaten by the worms and turned into dark, crumbly vermicompost.

Where to Put Your Worm Bin

Place your bin in the shade. Worms, like humans, prefer moderate temperatures, between 55 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

Worming Your Compost

Getting Started
Only a few things are needed to make good worm compost: a bin, bedding, water, worms and worm food.

Good Spots for Your Worm Bin

- Kitchen Corner
- Garage
- Basement
- Along outside wall of house
- Patio or deck
- Laundry room
- Shed

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FEEDING YOUR WORMS

Worms like to eat many of the same things we eat, only they aren’t as picky. Stale bread, apple cores, orange peels, lettuce trimmings, coffee grounds, and non-greasy leftovers are just some of the foods we usually discard that worms eat.

Do Feed
Vegetable scraps
Fruit peelings
Bread and grains
Tea bags
Non-greasy leftovers
Coffee grounds and filters
Well-crushed eggshells

Don’t Feed
Meat
Bones
Dairy products
Rubber bands
Twigs and branches
Dog and cat feces
Greasy foods

Begin feeding your worms only small portions at a time. As they multiply, you can add larger quantities of food scraps. Worms prefer smaller-sized scraps and will eat through them more quickly than large or whole pieces of food. Bury the scraps into the bedding regularly, rotating around the bin as you go. Indicate the last fed spot with a marker. If you return to the first spot and all the food has not been eaten, feed the worms less for a while. Over time, your worm population will increase to accommodate all your scraps. Worms always need a moist environment. Sprinkle water on any dry spots in your bin.