

Worm Composting

"Oh My Goodness, Worms are Eating My Garbage!"



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How Can I Get Worms to Eat My Garbage?

Getting worms to eat your garbage is easy! Redworms will turn all of your fruit, vegetable, and bread scraps into rich vermicompost. All you have to do is provide a suitable habitat in the form of a worm composting bin. You'll need the following:

- A sturdy plastic bin with a lid (you can also use a 10 gallon aquarium with a screen lid)
- Shredded newspaper
- A handful of soil (from outside, not potting soil) to add helpful microbes
- A couple of finely crushed eggshells (for calcium)
- Fruit and vegetable scraps (see What Will My Worms Eat? Below)
- Redworms (from the bait shop or mail order outlet)

If you are using a plastic tub with a lid, be sure to poke some holes in the lid to let air in. Soak enough shredded newspaper in warm water to fill the bin half full. Let it soak for a few minutes to make sure all the fibers get wet. Squeeze out the excess water (it should be about as wet as a wrung-out sponge) and spread the newspaper in the bin. Toss in the soil and eggshells. Put in a handful of food scraps, and then add the worms. They'll make their way into the bedding and start eating your garbage! Add more food scraps every couple of days but don't let a lot of uneaten food build up in the bin~ it'll smell bad!

What Will My Worms Eat?

Redworms will eat any fruit, vegetable or bread scraps. They don't care if they are cooked or uncooked, fresh or rotten, but keep any deep-fried foods or food with lots of grease out of the bin. The scraps will disappear more quickly if you chop them into small pieces. Here's a partial list of stuff to get you started:

Apple peels and cores	Banana peels	Leftover peas	Strawberry tops
Lettuce	Plums	Cauliflower	Melon rinds
Cucumber peels	Peaches	Broccoli	Spinach
Mushy grapes	Tea bags	Cabbage	Asparagus
Green bean ends	Coffee grounds	Pea pods	Bell peppers
Bread crusts	Carrots tops and peels	Lima beans	Pasta and rice

**Never put meat, dairy products or grease in the worm bin.
These items stink and will attract pests to the bin**

How Do I Keep My Worms Happy?

Just follow these simple rules, and your worms will stay happy and healthy:

- Worms don't like the light, so find a fairly dark place to keep them. Many people keep their worm bins in the basement or garage.
- Redworms like temperatures between 60F and 80F, so don't keep them outside in hot or cold climates.
- Keep the newspaper damp. Worms exchange oxygen through their skin, so they have to stay moist to breathe.
- Don't leave the lid off. Mice and other pests could get into the bin.
- Make sure pets aren't using the bin as a letter box. **Do not put any pet wastes in the bin.** They will smell bad and attract pests, and could pass on disease organisms.

How Do I Harvest My Worm Castings?

You should harvest your compost when all of the bedding has been eaten, and the contents of the bin look like dark brown, crumbly soil. The easiest way to separate the worms from the compost is to move all of the contents of your bin to one side of the bin. Wet some shredded newspaper, and put it in on the clean side. The worms will move over in a couple of weeks, and then you can scoop out the finished compost and add wet newspaper to fill the bin.

Use your finished compost like fertilizer on your houseplants, or plants in your garden. The compost adds nutrients and organic matter to the soil. If you put a little on the top of the soil around your plants, nutrients will seep into the soil each time you water.

Where Can I Find More Information?

For more information about worm composting check out:

***Worms Eat My Garbage 2nd Edition* by Mary Appelhoff, (ISBN 0-942256-10-7)**

This is the how-to book for worm composting. It is a great reference for starting your worm bin, figuring out how to solve worm bin problems, and learning about worms in general. Look for it at your local bookstore or library.

You can also visit Mary Applehoff's website at www.wormwoman.com.