

Vermicomposting



Solid Waste Management Division

1-800-722-8004

www.sbcounty.gov/dpw/solidwaste

Revised November 2015

Information provided by the Mojave Desert and
Mountain Joint Powers Authority.



Vermicomposting: Getting Started

Step 1: Choose a bin. Buy a bin or build one out of wood, plastic, an old dresser drawer, shopping crate or barrel.

What kind of bin. Your bin needs to be 10" to 16" deep, have a snug fitting lid, and holes in the bottom for drainage and sides for ventilation. The holes need to be 1/4" or smaller.

Step 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. You want to make sure your worms are as comfortable as possible.



Step 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 a worm bed tear newspaper into one inch strips then moisten them with a spray bottle or mist spray on a garden nozzle so they are as damp as a wrung out sponge. Fill your bin 3/4 full with the moist "bedding". Shredded corrugated cardboard, leaves, compost, sawdust and straw can also be added as bedding. Sprinkle bedding with a few pinches of soil. Do not use glossy paper or magazines.

Vermicomposting: Maintaining Your Bin

Step 4: Adopt some worms. Compost worms are often called “red worms” or “red wigglers”. They are different from earthworms and night-crawlers who live deep underground. You can find red worms in an old compost pile, get them from a friend’s worm bin, or buy them from a store. You can also search the internet for “red worm farms.” Start with one half to one pound or two nice big handfuls.

Step 5: Feed the worms their first meal. Start your worms off by burying about a pint of fruit and vegetable trimmings under the bedding. Then leave them alone for a couple of weeks while they get used to their new home.

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. Never leave food on top of the bedding.

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. Add dry bedding to absorb excess moisture. Wooden bins may require adding water occasionally.



Worm Composting: Harvesting & Use

Harvest worm compost at least once each year to keep your worms healthy. You can start by 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 some soil in the empty space and bury the 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" to 1.5" layer at the base of indoor or outdoor plants or blend no more than 20% worm compost into potting mix or garden soil.





Troubleshooting



PROBLEM	CAUSES	SOLUTIONS
Worms are dying	Food and bedding all consumed	Harvest compost, add fresh bedding and food
	Too dry	Dampen bedding with a spray bottle
	Extreme temperatures	Move bin so temperature is between 50-80 degrees Fahrenheit
Bin attracts flies and/or smells bad	Food exposed/ overfeeding	Add 4"-6" layer of bedding and stop feeding for 2-3 weeks
	Non-compostables present	Remove meat, pet feces, dairy products from the pile and dispose of them properly.
	Bedding is too moist/ water is accumulating at bottom	Add dry bedding/clear drainage holes
Sow bugs, beetles in the bin	These are good for our worm compost	Keep an eye on them to make sure they don't get out of hand.

