



Composting With Worms

Even if you live in an apartment or have no space for a compost pile in your yard, you can still compost. All you need is a plastic storage bin and a bunch of worms.

Called vermicomposting, composting with worms is easy and is an environmentally sound way to get rid of most kitchen wastes. Worms are voracious eaters--two pounds of worms can recycle one pound of kitchen waste in only 24 hours!

Getting started. Begin with a plastic storage bin. One that is 1' x 2' x 3.5' will handle the kitchen wastes from a family of six. Drill 8 to 10 one-quarter inch holes in the bottom of the bin for drainage. Cover the holes with fine nylon mesh to keep the worms from escaping. Place the bin on a tray to catch the excess moisture that will drain from the holes.

Worm bedding. Once you have your bin, add bedding for the worms. Shredded and moistened newspaper works well and will help reduce the amount of newspaper you need to recycle. Other sources of bedding include yard clippings, dead leaves, and wood shavings.

Add worms. Redworms work best. Often called red wigglers, these can be purchased from bait shops or from mail order catalogs. The number needed will depend on how much food you want to compost. Under good conditions, worms multiply rapidly so you may want to start slowly. The worms need a dark location with a temperature between 55 and 70 degrees F. Keep the bedding moist, but not saturated.

Feeding. Worms will eat most organic materials such as kitchen wastes, yard wastes, paper, and even manure. Avoid feeding them acidic foods such as citrus fruit, meats, and dairy products. Onions, garlic, and heavily spiced foods also should be avoided. Place moist food scraps on top of the bedding. While cutting the scraps into small pieces will speed up decomposition, this is not necessary.

Harvesting the compost. After a few months, you will have enough compost to harvest. Place the bin in bright light for a few minutes until the worms have wiggled down into the bedding. Gently scrape off the compost. When finished, add new bedding material and continue feeding.

Vermicomposting can be an easy and fun way to dispose of kitchen wastes. Not only will it provide a rich source of compost for your houseplants, but it also will supply your friends who fish with a constant supply of worms!

For more information on composting and other Backyard Conservation practices, contact your local conservation district or the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Or call 1-888-LANDCARE (toll free) for a free colorful Backyard Conservation booklet and tip sheets.

Information: Natural Resources Conservation Service