

HOW TO ASSEMBLE YOUR BIN WHEN YOU GET HOME

1. Drill ¼-1/2” holes in the top and sides of your bin (if using a single bin) and the bottom of the bin if using a 2 bin system.
2. Shred and soak some newspaper or scrap paper, make sure it soaks at least 15 minutes submerged in water.
3. Place the 2-4 blocks of wood in the bottom of the bin with no holes, then place the bin with the holes drilled in the bottom on the blocks of wood.
4. Pull out your wet newspaper, wring it out, fluff it up and place 2-3 inches of it in the bottom of the top bin. It should be moist but not dripping (Think of clothes coming out of the washer).
5. Sprinkle a light layer of moistened coconut coir or peat moss on one half of the shredded paper.
6. Gently empty your container of worms in a pile on one side of the bin on top of the newspaper.
7. Put on the lid and let them get accustomed to their new home for 24 hours.

AFTER 24 HOURS:

1. Add ½# of slightly decomposed room temperature food to one half of the bin (where you put the worms), spread it out and then cover lightly with a layer of moist shredded paper.
2. Put the cover back on and leave them to eat for 5-7 days.
3. Open the lid, you should see movement and the worms will dive below the surface to escape the light. If there is no more food left, i.e., it is all just black or brown compost then you will need to feed them again (about ½-3/4 #). If there is food left, check again in 2 days. Continue this pattern until you don't see any food left, then feed them again. If all the food is gone after 2-3 days, increase the amount of food.
4. In the meantime, you can be accumulating your kitchen scraps in quart size freezer bags. A full quart bag is about 2 pounds.

REGULAR FEEDING: AFTER the bin is 2/3rds full on one side, start feeding on the other side only. The worms will migrate, and you can harvest compost after 6 months. Thereafter you can harvest compost every 6-8 weeks from the side you are not feeding on.

As your worms multiply, which they do quickly, you will need to increase the amount of food you are giving them. They eat 6-7 times their weight each week; so, if you start with a pound of worms you will need about 4-6 pounds of scraps a week. If the worms start crawling up the

sides of the bins, they may need more food. Rather than add 12 # of food at a time, feed them every 5 days with 6 #s. See the Trouble Shooting Handout for other considerations.

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE: Once a year empty your entire bin and put fresh moist paper bedding in the bottom. Put your worms back in with some compost and start all over again. Note: you will have significantly more worms than when you started. You will have lots of compost from this cleaning!

VACATION: Going away for 3-6 weeks, make sure there is a lot of moist bedding in the bottom of the bin, feed them slightly more than the normal amount for a week and cover the food with 3-4" of moist bedding and enjoy your vacation. Don't add more food than they can eat in 2 weeks! It will attract flies and fungus gnats. They will eat the moist bedding and be very happy. Feed them when you get back. No pet sitting required.

What Will My Worms Eat?

You can feed your composting worms any unseasoned vegetable food scraps, breads, coffee/tea grounds, filters, and crushed eggshells. The crushed eggshells add the grit they need in their crop to grind up the food. I have found that composting worms prefer certain foods over others:

- Melon & squash rinds - Cantaloupe, honey dew, watermelon, butternut, acorn, zucchini, etc. They *love* sweet foods. If you can avoid it don't put the seeds in the worm bin. They won't eat them before they will germinate in the very fertile compost. (Sometimes, I end up letting them germinate and then pulling them up like sprouts and dropping them back in the bin.)
- Non-citrus fruit - berries, apples, pears, peaches, banana peels, etc.
- Carrot, potato & other vegetable peels - But beware, a potato peel with an eye may become a new potato plant.
- Bread: Bread can be tricky to compost because it molds quickly, introducing a new element to the bin. The key here is to crush it up into crumbs or small pieces.

Foods that Composting Worms Don't Like as Much: The worms will still eat these foods, but in large quantities they could harm your composting worms. NOTE: Infrequently I put small amounts of these foods in my worm composting bin without any problems.

- Citrus Fruits: oranges, limes, lemons, etc. (large quantities of citrus can burn a worm's sensitive skin) and the oils on the skin make them hard to break down. Make peels or shavings from them and freeze them)
- Onions and garlic. These can also burn their skin in large quantities. They won't eat the papery part of the skin.

What Not to Feed your Worms – Remember composting worms are vegetarian! Meat, dairy, bones & oils should never go in your bin. Cooked food often has seasonings, especially salt, which can harm your worms. Place your cooked foods in your outside compost bin or your Bokashi composter.

The key to putting anything in your bin safely and without attracting pests is to keep the pieces small – remember they don't have teeth! You can also keep your scraps in the refrigerator for a bit until they are starting to decompose. The worms will eat decomposing food faster than fresh. If I accumulate too much food for the worms, I save it in freezer bags in the freezer. When I defrost it, the scraps are already decomposing and mushy; drain the liquid off, let warm to room temperature and the worms consume it very fast. It also kills any insect eggs that might have been on the scrap peels, such as bananas.

Where I might purchase worms -

Uncle Jim's Worm Farm - <https://unclejimswormfarm.com>

Worm Ladies of Charlestown – <https://www.wormladies.com>

Gardener's Supply Company – <https://www.gardeners.com>

REFERENCES:

- Vermicomposting for Households, Rhonda Sherman NC State Extension Specialist: <https://composting.ces.ncsu.edu/vermicomposting-2/vermicomposting-for-households/>
- Worms Eat My Garbage, by Mary Appelhof; Flower Press; Revised and expanded second edition (October 6, 2003)
- Vermicomposting: How worms can reduce our waste - Matthew Ross: <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/vermicomposting-how-worms-can-reduce-our-waste-matthew-ross>

The troubleshooting diagram is a separate handout.

QUESTIONS:

If you have questions at any time, just call our Master Gardener helpline (302-856-2535 x535) and the call will be directed to either Marian Reedy or Judy Pfister. Or send us an email at sussexcountymastergardeners@gmail.com