

Red worms can survive in a wide variety of conditions, but they do best in a moist, dark environment around room temperature. It is best to avoid extremes in temperature, pH, or moisture level.

What Can I Feed My Worms?

Feed your worms fruit and vegetable waste, stale bread, old rice or pasta, coffee grounds, and the worms do the rest. The primary foods to avoid are meat and dairy products, citrus fruits and oily or processed foods. Be sure to bury your food scraps in the bedding to discourage molds and fruit flies. Bury the food in a different spot in the box at each feeding. Within a few days, it should be gone. If not, try feeding your worms a little less for a while.

When Do I Get My Vermicompost?

After a few months, you will notice that the original bedding has been replaced with rich, dark, worm compost. It's harvest time. Place about a pound of their favorite food on one side of the bin. Wait a few days until the majority of the worms have found the food, and use a plastic bag to harvest the worms. Remove the remaining vermicompost and start the bin anew using fresh bedding. An alternate method is to coax your worms to one side of your box by feeding only on that side for a few weeks. Then harvest the worm-free side of the box and replace it with fresh bedding.

For more information about worm composting and list of worm and worm box suppliers, visit CalRecycle's Web site at www.CalRecycle.ca.gov/Organics/Worms/.

Troubleshooting Guide For Worm Composting

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEMS	SOLUTION
Worm bin smells bad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much food • Too wet • Sludgy (anaerobic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed less • Check drainage holes/add dry bedding • Harvest castings
Fruit flies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food isn't buried 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy food • Cover surface of bedding with a sheet of newspaper • If problem persists, restart bin
Worms aren't eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much food • No grit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed less • Sprinkle with sterile soil or 1 tablespoon oyster flour
Too few worms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually increase feeding

WORMS

What Is Worm Composting?

Worm composting or "vermicomposting" is the practice of using earthworms to turn your kitchen scraps or other organic material into an exceptionally rich soil amendment for your house plants or garden. Worm composting at home is easy, and takes about as much effort to manage as a fish tank. The benefits of vermicomposting are many. You and your worms will help the environment by reducing the amount of garbage you produce. A medium-sized worm box can process more than 5 pounds of food waste each week! In return, you get vermicompost—a valuable soil amendment good for growing just about anything.

Will Any Worms Do?

Red worms (*Eisenia foetida*), also called red wigglers, are the best worms for worm composting. Red worms are a different species from common night crawlers, which need large amounts of soil and cool temperatures to survive. One pound of red worms (about a handful, or 1,000 worms) is enough to start a worm bin. Buy your worms from a worm farm, or get your worms from a friend's bin. Once your worm bin is established, you will have enough worms to help your friends start vermicomposting, too.

Where Will My Worms Live?

Vermicomposting can be done year round, indoors or outdoors. It's ideal for small spaces in the garage or under the kitchen sink. With proper care, your worm box will smell like fresh earth when you open it. A 12-15 gallon opaque plastic storage container or a sturdy wooden box can be easily fashioned into a home for your worms, or you can buy a bin especially designed for worms. Your bin should have a tight-fitting lid, holes drilled in the bottom for ventilation and drainage, and a tray to collect any excess liquid. Adding small legs or placing blocks or bricks in the tray will discourage the worms from exploring.

Eight or ten inches of bedding inside your bin will provide the worms with a damp, aerated place to live. Common bedding materials include strips of newspaper, shredded cardboard, or leached peat moss. Moisten the bedding and drain out excess water before adding your worms. Add a handful of sterile soil or sand to provide grit, which will help the worms digest food particles.