

Getting Started

- Choose your bin, depending upon your needs and household size. The more scraps you produce, the bigger bin you'll need.
- Pick a place to store your bin where it won't freeze or overheat, such as a laundry room, garage, barn, patio/deck or garden. If it's outside, make sure it's shaded in summer and in a protected area in winter. Extreme hot/cold is harmful to your worms.
- Prepare the bedding, ensuring it's moist and cool and add a handful of garden soil to help the worms grind their food (no sand).
- Order your worms from an online supplier or get some from a friend. Start with 200 to 500 red wigglers (*Eisenia fetida*).
- When your worms arrive, place the worms in the bin, add some food and cover with additional bedding. Check on them after a week to see how they're doing and how much they've eaten.

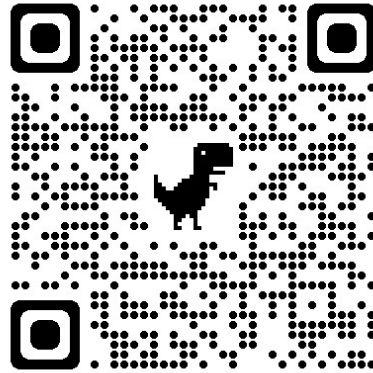
Bin Maintenance

- Feed your worms weekly (approximately 1 quart or so, depending upon bin size) and bury the food under the bedding.
- Add fresh bedding every 1 to 3 months.
- Keep the bedding moist. If too dry, sprinkle with water; if too wet, add dry bedding to absorb the excess moisture.

Resources

University of California
Master Gardeners of Amador
offer classes and information on
composting. Check out our website:
ucanr.edu/sites/Amador_County_MGs/
(209) 223-6838
mgamador@ucanr.edu

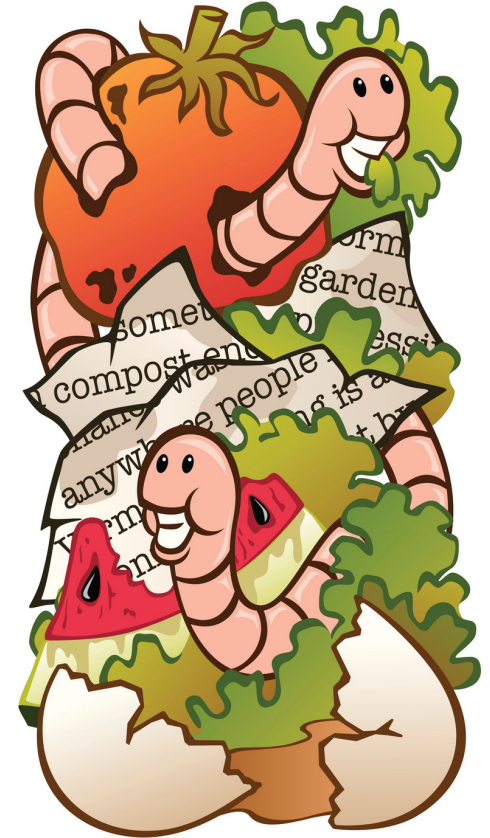
**For more composting information, along
with instructions on how to:
"Build a Simple Worm Compost Bin"
(including troubleshooting tips)
click on the QR code**



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources

UC Master Gardener Program

**UC Master Gardener Program
COMPOST EDUCATION**



**Worm
Composting**

What is worm composting?

Also known as vermicomposting, it's the process of using worms to compost materials. The end result is a product called worm castings. This is a great way to reduce the amount of kitchen scraps going to the landfill.

Benefits

- Acts as a light but complete fertilizer and also contains trace minerals.
- Contains beneficial bacteria, fungi, enzymes & plant growth hormones, as well as large and diverse microbe populations.
- Helps improve the soil's water holding capacity.
- Can aid in resistance to certain rots, wilts and fungal issues.

What kind of Worms?

- Best composting worm is the Red Wiggler (*Eisenia fetida*).
- Composting worms differ from earthworms as they are surface dwellers who live in compost.
- Worms like dark & quiet places and also breathe through their skin, so keep your bin moist.
- Worms have a gizzard to grind food.
- Worms do best in temperatures between 40 to 80 degrees.
- Worms can produce 2 to 3 egg cocoons per week once mature.

What Kind of Bin?

- You can buy or make your bin, depending upon your needs. The bin needs a lid and holes in the bottom and sides for ventilation and drainage.
- Worm bins can be commercial stackable units, a commercial worm bag or a DIY storage container or box.

Bedding

- Shredded paper, plain newsprint (not glossy), torn cardboard, sawdust, aged straw & shredded leaves (no eucalyptus or pine).
- Bedding should be moist like a lightly wrung out sponge and needs to be refreshed every 1 to 3 months. Check moisture levels regularly.
- Additional bedding can be used as extra insulation during hot or cold weather.

Feeding your Worms

YES PLEASE: Fruit & vegetable scraps, used coffee grounds & filters, used tea, paper towels, aged manures like cow, sheep/goat.

JUST A LITTLE: Plain bread, pasta, potatoes, rice or oatmeal. Too much can cause gut problems and death.

NO WAY: Meat, dairy, oils or fats, salad dressing, citrus, human/pet waste, pesticide contaminated materials, unaged manures.



Harvesting Castings

Harvest castings at least once a year or more. Start preparing to harvest a few weeks ahead by doing the following:

Single bin type: Move castings to one side. Remove food scraps and bedding and place on opposite side and feed on this side only. Worms will move to the feeding side after a few weeks.

Stackable unit: Remove all bedding/food to a new tray & place tray on top of casting layer. Feed new tray only.

Remove castings to a container and sort through for any remaining worms (return to bin). Castings can be used as is or screened. To screen, castings should be lightly damp so they crumble easily. If too wet, allow to dry on the screen until ready (check daily). A screen with 1/8" openings works best & can be made by stapling hardware cloth to a wooden frame. Mesh file trays will also work. Place sheets of newspaper under the screen & elevate the screen 3" above the paper. Dump castings on the screen and rub them through with either gloved hands or a plastic scraper. Store castings in a covered container in a cool, dark place.

Uses

Castings can be added to the planting hole or can be sprinkled around the plant and lightly worked into the soil. Sprinkle castings on top of fertilizer applications, then cover. Adding up to 20% castings to planting or soil mix will improve nutrition and water retention.

Leachate

Leachate is the liquid that drains from the worm bin and should not be confused with worm tea. Leachate can contain pathogens or phytotoxins harmful to plants or humans. If it smells bad, DON'T USE IT. If using leachate, dilute 10:1 (water/leachate) and avoid using on edible plants.