

Worm Farming

MONITOR AND MAINTAIN!

Monitor conditions in your worm farm at least once a week to ensure the worms are in good condition. Check the following when adding more material to the worm farm:

- **Leachate:** Worm juice or leachate can accumulate at the bottom of the farm, and is a good environment for pest breeding. Make sure this is emptied regularly.
- **Worm condition:** Using a small garden fork, gently dig into the surface layer and there should be plenty of worms consuming the above raw material.
- **Depth of bedding:** When the bedding or worm castings build up over time (more than 20 centimetres deep), finished worm castings should be removed and a new tray started.

HARVESTING

After several months, worms need to be separated from their castings which have built up in the worm farm. To prepare for harvesting, do not add new food for two weeks.

The easiest way of separating worms from castings is by using light. Remove the finished material from the worm farm and spread it onto a surface. Worms will quickly burrow downwards, allowing the surface material to be removed.

After repeating this operation a thin layer of material remains containing all of the worms which should be added to the new bedding with a fresh supply of food. This leaves a harvest of worm castings. The castings should be stored for a week or two before being used as a fertiliser.



TROUBLESHOOTING

Pests	Problem: Too much raw food added. Solution: Ensure worms have consumed most material before adding more.
Worm farm smells	Problem: Too much food, not enough air due to excess moisture, feeding with wrong foods or worms have died due to very hot conditions. Solution: Reduce amount of food added. Mix in some shredded cardboard or paper into surface. Remove any meat or fats. Put farm in cool position and start the process again.
Worms trying to escape	Problem: Not enough food, too dry, too wet or too hot. Solution: Add more food, moisten bedding, mix in some shredded cardboard or paper to absorb moisture, move farm to a cooler location.
Worms dying	Problem: Too hot or too dry. Solution: Move farm to cooler location, add water and moist food material.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

See the brochure "Sustainable Gardening Using Compost" for information on where and how to apply worm castings and leachate in your garden.

Visit the ZeroWaste WA website:
www.zerowastewa.com.au



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WHAT IS WORM FARMING?

Worm farming is a simple way of converting food scraps and other organic material into a nutrient rich organic fertiliser called worm castings.

WHAT CAN BE PLACED IN A WORM FARM?

Yes ✓

Most vegetable & fruit scraps
Tea leaves & tea bags
Coffee grounds
Crushed egg shells
Weeds and flowers
Paper & cardboard
(shredded and pre-soaked)



No ✗

Animal droppings
Meat products
Fish
Dairy products
Glass
Metal
Nappies
Citrus fruits/onion
(smell too strong)



FIVE EASY STEPS

1) Find a site

Select a convenient, cool and shady spot in your garden for your worm farm. A worm farm can also be located on the balcony of your apartment. Make sure the worm farm is out of the sun - worms can't tolerate hot conditions.



2) Find housing

A variety of containers can be used to house your worms. A purpose designed worm farm with internal trays and a drainage system is the easiest to use. These are available from your local garden centre or hardware store. The best worm farms are ones where the worms have room to move; where there is a drainage system so that excess water can escape; and where you can remove the finished worm castings easily.



3) Worm bedding

In all worm farms, a bedding layer of worm castings is needed to provide a 'home' for the worms to live in when they're not feeding on food scraps. Place a few sheets of wet newspaper on the bottom of the tray and then cover it with about 5 centimetres of moist worm castings. You should be supplied with enough worm castings for the bottom of your tray when you purchase your worms. If not, you can add some pre-soaked peat or coconut fibre (coir).



4) Moving the worms in

Worms are available from nurseries and hardware stores. Add the worms to your bedding, and place a pre-soaked newspaper or hessian bag to cover the surface. This helps to keep light out (which worms prefer!) and helps keep the bedding moist. Place the lid on the worm farm.



The most suitable worm species for farms include the Red Worm, Tiger Worm and the Red Tiger Worm. Ordinary garden variety worms do not survive well in worm farms.

5) The first meal

Chop the organic matter into small pieces. Pull back the newspaper or hessian layer and spread a thin layer of chopped fruit and vegetables (not citrus or onion) onto the bedding surface. Ensure that the newspaper or hessian is placed back and the lid is positioned on top of the worm farm.

Check to see if the food has been consumed after about a week, and if so, add more food scraps or organic matter. Be careful not to overfeed your worms.

