

A Beginner's Guide to Worm Farming

Did you know a worm can eat its own weight in food every day? Worm farming is a great way to reduce your household food waste. As long as you have a sheltered balcony or garden, it's easy to do and creates nutritious plant food for your garden.

The following guide will show you just how easy it is to be a worm farmer:

What do I need?

- A worm farm
- Compost worms – minimum 1000 (or 1000 x no. of people in your household)
- Newspaper and a hessian sack
- Food scraps
- Compost (if building your own worm farm)

How do I get started?

FIND A LOCATION. Worms are seasonal creatures. In summer, keep your worms in a cool, sheltered environment, away from direct sunlight. In the colder months, move them into a sunny area to keep them productive as temperatures drop. Where possible, place close to your kitchen so it's convenient to maintain and add scraps.

SET UP YOUR WORM FARM. The easiest way to get started is to buy a commercially made worm farm. These usually have 2-3 layers, all of which do different things. It's useful to think of them like a house (see left).



1

Start your worm farm by lining the base of the middle level with newspaper or cardboard that's cut to fit the base.

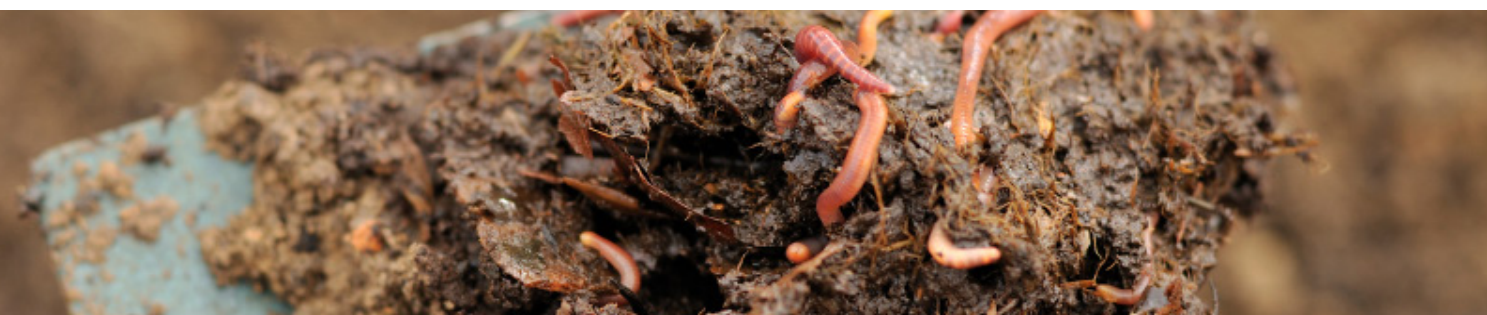
2

Soak the bedding block that comes with your worm farm for 30 minutes before spreading it over the cardboard or newspaper. You can also use a layer of compost to act as bedding for your worms.

3

Add your worms and cover them with 5 sheets of damp newspaper and a hessian sack or old t-shirt. Replace the worm farm lid and you're ready to go.

Once your middle layer is full to the brim, you can begin to use your top, or third, level. Start by placing food, covered with your hessian sack, in this level, and your worms will gradually move upwards to live and feed.





Feeding your worms

YES

Fruit and vegie scraps, teabags and coffee grounds, crushed eggshells, small amounts of bread or pasta, moist cardboard and newspaper.

NO

Onion, garlic, chilli, dairy, citrus fruit (lemons, limes or oranges), meat and bones, fish, oils or grease, dog or cat faeces.

REMEMBER:

- Worm farms process less food than a compost bin, so make sure you're not overfeeding your worms. Uneaten food will begin to smell and attract unwanted pests.
- Each day a worm will consume approximately its body weight in food. This means you can feed your worm farm a few handfuls every few days. Once it's established and the worms are breeding, you can try feeding them more food.
- Cut food into small pieces - this makes it easier for the worms to eat.

Harvesting the results Your worm farm will produce 2 kinds of fertiliser:

LIQUID Worm wee will collect at the bottom of your worm farm. To harvest, simply open the tap at the bottom of your farm and empty into a container. Dilute the liquid by 1 part worm wee, to seven parts water for a rich plant fertiliser.

SOLID Known as 'castings', worm poo will develop in the layers where your worms live - the middle and upper layers of your farm. Castings take longer to accumulate than wee, and can be harvested every 4-6 months. Scrape away the top level and harvest the castings below that look like rich, dark soil.

FAQ

For more info about worm farms, check out [Do Something's FoodWise.com.au](http://DoSomething'sFoodWise.com.au)

Is my worm farm supposed to smell bad?

A well managed worm farm should smell pleasantly earthy. If your farm has a bad smell, remove any rotting food and make sure you're not overfeeding your worms. You can also gently aerate your bedding with a garden fork and add moistened newspaper to help counter the affects of overfeeding.

Remember also that your worms like moisture - if you don't get a few drops when you squeeze a handful of bedding, then spray with a little water. You can also use a sprinkling of dolomite or lime to re-establish your worm farm's pH - these are available from your local garden store.

What happens when I go away on holiday?

Worms can live for 4 weeks without fresh food. Put damp newspaper in the worm farm and leave in a cool location. Empty the 'worm juice' before you go and leave the tap open with a container underneath it to collect the liquid.

Why are there flies in my worm farm?

A well managed worm farm shouldn't attract flies as they have difficulty breeding where food is being quickly consumed by worms. If flies become an annoyance, reduce how much you feed your farm or try covering it with a hessian sack. You can also dig food into the soil to speed up processing.

How do I stop pests invading my worm farm?

Insects like slaters, beetles, springtales and mites are all a part of the natural decomposition cycle and are fine to have in your worm farm. Ants often indicate your worm farm is too dry, so add a few drops of moisture if they become a problem. You can also place the legs of your worm farm in water bowls to cut off their pathway.

