

## So You Want to Build a Wormery

### +WHY SHOULD I HAVE A WORMERY?

We can improve our semi-alkaline soil structure by adding compost, sulfur and peat moss. We can improve our nutrient balance too, but to do all this more efficiently it helps to hire the work out. Worms work cheap and as the worms munch their way through soil they ingest, clay, silt, sand and bits of organic matter. This is expelled as water stable granules called castings. These castings create soil capillaries and other spaces to improve soil structure thus allowing water and air to flow more freely. This also helps to facilitate deeper root growth for your plants and providing additional water storage space. Soil that has been worked by worms can take in water 4 times faster than soil that hasn't. This also reduces run-off (wasted water) and prevents water loss through evaporation from puddles when soil cannot absorb rain or irrigation quickly enough.

### +WORM COUNT

If you dig in your soil and you see a lot of worms, this is usually a good sign that you have pretty healthy soil and this is usually due to a lot of organic material and a friendly environment.

If you dig up a 12"x 12" x 7" and you see fewer than 10 worms in your soil sample this is a bad sign. The fewer the worm numbers the worse the situation. The more the merrier, you can never have too many.

This is a sign that your soil is well stocked with organic material and trace minerals will also be more available to your plants. Your soil is full of structure and fertility.

## **+WHEN & HOW TO IMPORT WORMS INTO YOUR SOIL.**

You cannot just go and import worms into your soil if the conditions are not right. Without providing the right soil moisture, food and temperatures the worms will just leave and move into area's where the environment matches their needs. Okay, then what do I do. . . . .

First build a Wormery and add their "vermicompost" to the bad area's in your garden and before you know it the worms will be moving into your garden all on their own. Not to mention that the vermicompost will enhance your gardens, lawns and landscape.

Another great benefit to having a Wormery is that reduce your families impact on the local landfill.

You will be surprised to learn that there is no odor or noise with a Wormery. The Wormery will take up less space than a composter. The care involved of your Wormery is minimal.

## **+HOW TO BUILD A WORMERY**

You can buy a worm composting bin or you can make one out of a plastic garbage can or Rubbermaid style bin. You will need to drill some holes at the bottom for drainage. Worms feed on scraps and a lot of moisture is produced. I put the lid of my bin under the container and collect the excess fluids. This worm tea makes a great liquid fertilizer for houseplants or transplants.

Cover the drainage holes with 1 inch of gravel. Cover this with a fine mesh screen or weed barrier cloth. This way when you try to collect your worm castings you won't mix the gravel with the rest of the bin.

Next add the bedding material:

Shredded leaves, grass clippings

Wet strips of newspaper, not include glossy paper

Wet strips of cardboard

Kitchen scraps: vegetable and fruit scraps, bread, pasta, tea bags, coffee grounds and filters, and crushed egg shells. Try to help speed up the process by cutting up large melon rinds.

A little peat moss, not much too acidic.

Do not add:

Meat or dairy products. No animal manure's. Fatty foods, like peanut butter or mayonnaise take longer to break down. They may also develop odors or attract insects. Fill your bin within a couple inches of the top of the bin, but do not pack down. This would cause the worms to have trouble moving around.

#### **+ADD WORMS**

Do not use earthworms. They do not adapt well to worm bins. Use red worms (Red Wigglers). You can usually get them at garden centers, bait shops or on-line. I have had great success with [www.vermico.com](http://www.vermico.com). You buy your worms in one pound increments. One pound usually equals roughly 1,000 worms. 1,000 worms are usually enough to start with. They will start reproducing in 4 to 6 weeks of age. They are hermaphroditic (both male and female.) Their numbers will not exceed the space and food available.

To feed your worms, use a trowel or small shovel to divide your worm bin into sections. Make a small trench and add

your kitchen scraps. Cover with the sides of your trench to avoid inviting or creating fruit flies or gnats. It is a good idea to have about an inch of bedding on the top of the kitchen scraps. This also helps you to avoid creating odors. You should realize that the worms will die without enough food sources. We add scraps to our worm bin every day or every other day. When the bedding is gone, you need to remove castings. Too many castings can be toxic and would kill your worms. The easiest way to do this is to push the bedding to one side of the bin and add fresh bedding to the side you have emptied. In about 2 weeks the worms will move over into the fresh bedding. When the time has passed scoop out the old material. Add more bedding to the bin and continue feeding. Use worm worked area to your gardens. Do this about every three months.

You will be amazed at how easy this is to do and you should have few problems. To give you a heads up to possible problems read on, please make sure the temp stays between 55 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit. Because, of this temperature range we cannot leave our bins outside through the winter. I have found that they do fine in either the basement or insulated garage. Worms need moisture but you should never let the bin become swampy or soupy. The worms would drown or leave. Worms are also sensitive to vibrations. Use thought when you set up your bin and they should never be in an area where they would have to deal with a lot of vibrating. (For instance, the furnace, refrigerator or speakers) The worms would try to leave to find a better location.

You will find building and keeping worms a fun and worthwhile project. The worms do almost all the work and we, and our gardens reap the benefits. **HAPPY GARDENING!!!**

Reference:

**GREAT GARDEN FORMULAS**

Joan Benjamin & Deborah L. Martin

Rodale Press

33 Minor St.

Emmaus, Pa.

18098

ISBN: 0-87596-798-1

[www.rodalepress.com](http://www.rodalepress.com)

**WORM COMPOSTING**

Joshua D. Nelson

Storey Books

Schoolhouse Road, Dept. BN

Pownal, Vermont 05261

1-800-441-5700

[www.storey.com](http://www.storey.com)

**THE VEGETABLE GARDENER'S BIBLE**

Edward C. Smith

Storey Books

Schoolhouse Road, Dept. BN

Pownal, Vermont 05261

1-800-441-5700

[www.storey.com](http://www.storey.com)