

Create your own Eden

# Easy worm farming guide



our environment *it's a living thing*

## Worm farms

- \* Take your food leftovers and turn them into a rich soil-like substance called 'castings'.
- \* Red or tiger worms are the most commonly used worms.
- \* Worms can be grown in worm farms, or beds or troughs in the ground.
- \* Worm farms can be kept outside, inside, on the balcony or in the garage. They are ideal for units.
- \* Worm castings are great for feeding house plants, adding to seedling mixes and potting soils or top-dressing around plants.

## 4 easy steps to successful Worm Farming

### 1 Choosing the site

Worms don't like to get too hot, so make sure your worm farm or bed is in a well shaded spot.



### 2 Collecting worm food

Worms like to eat food wastes like vegetable and fruit peelings, pulp from the juicer, tea bags, crushed egg shells and bread. They also like small amounts of soiled paper and cardboard (such as shredded egg cartons). Worms least favourite foods include dairy products, butter & cheese, meat, fish, fat and bones; very oily foods and citrus, onion and garlic.

**HINT:** Worms find smaller scraps easier & quicker to digest. Blend food scraps with water before feeding worms.



### 3 Making a Worm Farm or bed

You can buy a commercial worm farm, build one with boxes or make a worm bed in your garden.

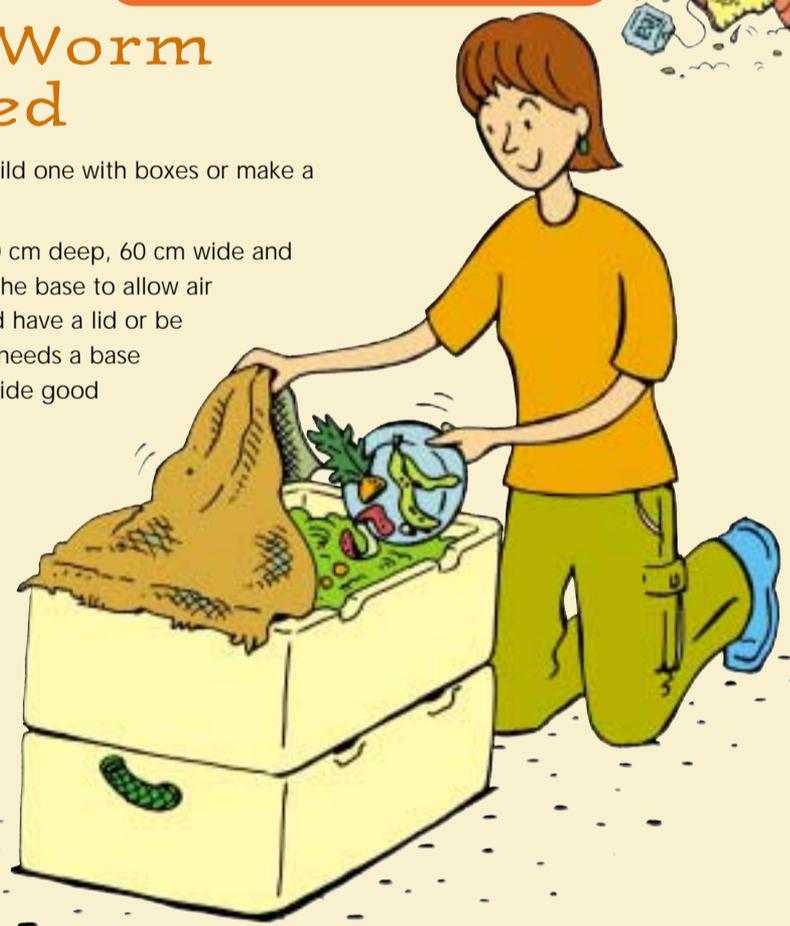
Typical dimensions for a worm box are 30 cm deep, 60 cm wide and 90 cm long. The box must have holes in the base to allow air in and for good drainage. The box should have a lid or be covered with hessian or underfelt. Plus it needs a base or tray underneath to catch liquid or provide good drainage.

**HINT:** Worms can be bought direct from commercial worm growers or through your local nursery. Check the Yellow Pages under Worm Farms. They are generally sold by the thousand (1,000 worms weigh about 250 grams).

A combination of finished compost, leaves and paper works best as bedding. The bedding should be torn or shredded so that the worms can move around easily and the bedding material should be soaked in water before it is added to the box. Make the bedding layer 10-15 cm deep.

Now add the worms: Between one and two thousand worms is a good number to start with. Spread the worms out gently on the surface and allow them to burrow down.

Start adding your kitchen waste regularly in small amounts.



Simply place the food waste in the box and cover it with bedding material or a handful of soil or compost.

Don't add too much at once. Give the worms more food only when they have eaten most of their previous meal.

**HINT:** The liquid produced by your worm farm is full of nutrients - dilute and use on your pot plants. Use the castings as well.

### 4 Harvesting worms

Harvest the worm castings/compost (vermicompost) by moving it all to one side of the bin; add fresh bedding to the empty side. Many of the worms will migrate to the fresh bedding in a few days. The valuable worm castings can then be taken out and used.



### Worms need: \*

- \* Moisture as they breathe through their skins and need to keep moist.
- \* Drainage as they can suffocate if it gets too wet.
- \* Cover as worms don't like direct light. This will also discourage flies and other pests.

**Not too much acid:** Worms don't like acidic foods such as citrus peels or onions!

# Problems? Try this Easy worm farm fix-it guide



Worm farms are simple and easy to maintain.

You will only need to spend a few hours two or three times a year preparing bedding and harvesting compost and worms.

But, sometimes there can be problems. Some common worm farm problems and their solutions are listed below:

## My worm farm smells!

Your worm farm can start to smell if the worms are being fed more than they can eat or if the worm farm is too wet.

**Fix it!** Start by feeding the worms slowly and gradually build up.

Make sure that your worm farm is well drained.

If it is too wet, the worms may drown.

Worm farms can be kept outside, inside, on the balcony or in the garage.



Going on holidays?  
Feed paper.



## Unwelcome visitors?

Ants or cockroaches might find your worm farm a good place to live. Don't worry, although they can be a bit of a nuisance, they won't harm your worms.

**Fix it!** Keep a lid on your worm farm or keep a hessian or underfelt cover over the food scraps. This will discourage unwelcome visitors. If your worm farm sits on legs, place each leg in a bowl of water. This will prevent unwanted creatures getting in.



## My worms won't multiply!

Worms need the right conditions in order to breed. They need to be kept cool (the ideal temperature range is 18-25 degrees celsius); moist but not too wet; away from direct light; and be fed the right food. Some food wastes such as fruits, grains and sugary foods tend to be acid-forming. Worms will not live and breed well in acidic conditions.

**Fix it!** Keep your worm farm or bed out of the direct sun.

Make sure the farm or bed is covered, so that it doesn't get too wet in the rain, and there is good drainage.

Add a sprinkling of wood ash or dolomite or lime every few weeks to prevent the worm farm from becoming too acid.



Vinegar flies? Add lime.  
Too acidic? Add paper.

## For more on worms and worm farming

Contact your local council or the Department of Environment and Conservation to find out more about vermiculture, composting and waste reduction. There are many good publications on composting and worm farming, try your local library or phone the Department of Environment and Conservation on 131 555



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