



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ RECYCLING PROGRAM

HOW TO USE YOUR WORM FACTORY



The Worm Factory is a stacking tray worm bin. These bins have multiple, nesting trays that sit above a liquid collection tray. Holes in the bottoms of the nesting trays allow worms to 'eat their way up' leaving vermicompost behind. The idea behind the design is to make it easier to separate worms from finished vermicompost. Worms are fed in the lowest tray until it is full, then the next (empty) tray is set on top. Worms move upward toward the available food. When the uppermost tray is full, the lowest is full of vermicompost which can be emptied into the garden. At capacity, the Worm Factory can handle about three quarts of food scraps per week.

Getting Started

- Assemble the Worm Factory according to directions. Put the collector tray into the base tray and place a little newspaper and a handful of coir mixed with the vermiculite into it so that any worms that stray down there will have some food, shelter, and a way back up to the next level.
- Put one working tray on top of the base tray and stack the other working trays next to the Worm Factory. You will not need them until the first working tray is filled to the top with bedding, food scraps and worms.
- Place 4 sheets of newspaper or the square piece of cardboard included with the bin over the holes in the first working tray. This will help to prevent worms and castings from dropping into the collector tray during start up.
- To make the bedding, soak one of the coir bricks that came with your worm factory in two gallons of water for 15 minutes. Use your hands to break the block up into small particles. Moisten half of the shredded paper that came with your bin and mix it with the coir. Put the mixture in the first working tray and let any excess water drain off through the holes in the tray.
- Add a half or full pound of worms. Empty the contents of the worm container, including the material the worms were packed in, on top of the bedding in the working tray. Leave the worms in a clump and let them spread out on their own.
- Cover the worms and bedding with a 1-2 inch layer of moistened shredded paper. This layer helps to prevent fruit flies.
- Add food scraps. Start your worms out with about a quart of fruit and vegetable scraps. Pull the shredded paper back and bury the scraps under a handful of bedding. Then replace the shredded paper to cover the food scraps.

Do Feed

Fruit and Vegetable Scraps--Mold and rot are fine!
Avoid overfeeding citrus--should be no more than 1/5 of food
Coffee grounds, filters and teabags
Egg Shells, Breads and Grains
Paper towels and Tissues

Do Not Feed

Meat, Fish, Dairy Products, Butter, Greasy Foods,
Pet waste

- Wait about a week before adding more scraps. Adjust the amount of scraps upward very gradually as your worm population grows. When your system is fully functioning, you will be able to cover about half of the surface of the working tray with one inch of food scraps every week.
- Always keep the food covered with 1-2 inches of shredded paper. You will need to replenish the supply every few weeks.
- Allow the compost in the first tray to build up about an inch past where the second tray will rest. To start the second tray, scoop about an inch of compost from the original tray and place it in the new tray. This insures that the worms will have access to the microorganisms and habitat in which all are comfortable in the new tray. Put the food scraps in the new tray and cover with an inch of shredded paper as usual. The worms will move up to eat in the new tray.
- Add the remaining trays in the same fashion. Continue adding trays until they are all in use.
- When the last tray is full, remove the black, castings-rich material from the first tray and put it on potted plants or use it in the garden. Use the empty tray to continue the cycle.
- The bin must be in a shady spot. Keep the bedding moist. Food scraps are very moist, so you will probably seldom need to add any water. If the bedding seems dry, sprinkle it with water to keep it as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Cover the bin with a piece of plastic or a garbage can lid to keep rain from entering during the rainy season.
- Leave the tap in the open position with a bucket underneath so you can catch the moisture and not risk making a bathtub in the bottom collector pan for your worms. The liquid is not 'worm tea,' it is excess moisture from the fruits and vegetables in the bin. You can use it to water plants, but don't use it on sensitive plants.

For More Information

- Come to a Hands-On Wormshop to learn everything you need to know about composting with worms. You can also get worms at the Wormshop if you reserve materials in advance. Call the Worm Doctor.
- Order a copy of the Worm Composting brochure by calling the Worm Doctor.

Learn more about composting and order publications online at www.compostsantacruzcounty.org

Questions about Worms?

Call Santa Cruz County's Worm Doctor at 831-427-3452.



The Home Composting Program is sponsored by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and produced by the Santa Cruz County Department of Public Works Recycling and Solid Waste Services

