

Worm Farming

A Factsheet for Worm Farming at Home

Why Worm farm?

Organic waste in landfill breaks down over a number of years in anaerobic (without oxygen) conditions. One of the by-products of this type of degradation is landfill gas which comprises, in large part, methane – a greenhouse gas 21 times greater than carbon dioxide at trapping heat within the Earth's atmosphere. Worm farming is an easy and practical way to recycle organic waste at home to prevent it from heading to landfill.

Benefits of Worm farming

- Worms turn your organic waste into rich castings which can be used as fertiliser on your garden
- Worms are a fun way to get children involved in the garden and in recycling
- Worm farming helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Worms recycle your organic waste for you
- Using worm castings and worm juice can help reduce the amount of weeding, water and artificial fertilisers your garden requires
- Worm castings and worm juice will help to improve the quality of your soil
- Worm farms produce a rich liquid fertiliser (worm juice) for your garden too

Where to put your Worm farm

Worm farms do best undercover in a garage, carport or laundry. They can be placed outside so long as they are out of the afternoon sun. If it is cold they like to be covered with a hessian sack to help insulate them.

Building a Worm farm

Worm farms can be store bought or made yourself using an old bath tub, fridge, wooden crate or a polystyrene box. If you are making your own remember to raise it off the ground or use wire mesh underneath to prevent vermin entering.

Worm farming precautions

Worm castings and worm juice is produced from natural materials and contains a variety of living organisms. On rare occasions, these organisms have been associated with illness and allergies in humans. For health reasons, it is important to:

- Wash your hands after handling worm castings and worm juice
- Protect broken skin by wearing gloves
- Keep castings moist to prevent spores or bacteria becoming airborne

Using Castings and Worm Juice

Worm castings and worm juice have a number of applications in the garden. Worm juice should be diluted with water to a ratio of 1:10 or resemble the consistency of weak tea before use.

Worm Castings

- Mix with potting mix and use in potted plants
- Spread mulch around plants
- Lightly sprinkle on lawns as conditioner
- Dig into soil or garden beds to increase nutrient levels and microbial activity
- Mix with compost and use in veggie gardens

Worm Juice

- Apply to potted plants, garden beds, lawns or veggie patches as a liquid fertiliser

What to feed your worms

- Chopped up fruit and vegetable scraps / peelings – cooked or raw
- Crushed eggshells
- Coffee grindings, tea bags and tea leaves
- Egg cartons (not with shiny stickers), newspaper, pizza boxes – soaked and ripped up
- Leaves
- Manures
- Hair, vacuum cleaner dust, floor sweepings

What NOT to feed your worms

- Dairy products
- Meat and bones
- Bread
- Liquids
- Citrus fruits – oranges, lemons etc.
- Onion family – onions, leeks, garlic, etc.
- Plastics, foils, non-organics

Trouble shooting

Little white worms or maggots – Indicate acidic conditions. Treat by sprinkling a small handful of garden lime over the top layer of food scraps or place a 3 or 4 slices white bread on the top layer and leave for a few days. This will attract most of the little white worms. Then take the bread out and bury it.

Ants – Indicate dry or acidic conditions. Put each worm farm foot in a cup of water or cover the legs with Vaseline to prevent more ants entering. Pour a bucket of water through the worm farm to moisten it up and sprinkle a handful of garden lime over the top layer of food to reduce acidity.

Vinegar Flies – Too much food! Remove some food and feed the worms less. Cover food scraps with soil or wet newspaper after feeding them. Perhaps start another worm farm or a compost heap!

Odour – This occurs when there is too much food, and the worms aren't getting through it. Remove some food, pour a bucket of water through the worm farm and sprinkle a handful of garden lime over the top.

Holidays - If you're going on holiday worms should be fine for 3-4 weeks. Slow release foods such as moistened newspapers, lucerne or pea straw will ensure they have enough food to eat throughout this period.

For further information please contact Wyndham City Council Waste and Litter Education Officers on 1300 023 411 or wastewise@wyndham.vic.gov.au