

# WORM FARMING BASICS

## CONTAINING THE WORMS

You may choose to buy the commercially available 3 tiered worm farms however, any container from an ice cream tub to a bath tub can be used if it provides the necessary requirements. These are:

- Good drainage
- Good ventilation
- Proofing against flies and vermin
- A cool shaded position

## SETTING UP THE WORM FARM

(1) The drainage system, whether it be holes in the bottom of a plastic tub or a bath tub plug hole, must be covered with flyscreen or shade cloth to prevent loss of worms. A layer of damp newspaper or cardboard will keep this in place. A bucket or other suitable container should be placed under drainage point.

(2) A new worm farm requires bedding material such as coconut matting (as in hanging basket liners) or damp straw (approximately 5cm deep). Make sure bedding material is moist.

(3) Add worms. [For the commercial worm farms it is recommended to add at least 1000 worms. These can be purchased from some hardware suppliers or check your local paper for ads]. Feeding can commence immediately.

(4) The last stage in setting up your worm farm is to cover it. Worms are very sensitive to UV light and can't do their good work on the surface if exposed. Cover with a layer of moist newspaper or cardboard then hessian or carpet. This not only excludes light but also retains moisture.

## GENERAL NOTES ON WORM FARMING

The worms are composting worms and not the common earthworm. There are several types of composting worms: 'tigers', 'reds' and 'blues'. These are surface dwelling worms which feed on soft organic material. They will feed on just about anything once living but kitchen waste and manures are the best food source for worms. Newspaper and cardboard will also be processed. They seem particularly fond of carpet underlay!

Onion skins and citrus peel should be avoided. Also it is not advisable to add fish or meat scraps as these will attract vermin.

Whatever food is given, the smaller the pieces the quicker it will be converted into rich castings.

It is important not to overfeed the worms. They can only process so much, and if too much is given, the worm farm can become a smelly, rotting pile.

A layer up to 2cm thick can be given at a time. Depending on the number and density of the worms they will process this very rapidly. More can then be added. They will breed more and process material more efficiently at high population density.

The ideal placement of a worm farm would be in a shady position with an ambient temperature of 20°C – 25°C. However this is not always possible and worms can tolerate a much wider range (in theory 10°C – 30°C).

## PRODUCTS OF WORM FARMS

There are two valuable products from a worm farm.

**Liquid fertiliser also known as 'worm tea'.** This can be diluted 50/50 with water and used on any plants, be they ornamental or vegetable or fruit trees or even native trees. It is rich in nutrients and will enhance the growth and vigour of all plants.

**Worm castings.** This is the material that has passed through the gut of the worm and excreted. It is rich in plant nutrients and can be used directly or added to water to make a slurry and fed by watering can to vegetables/ fruit trees or any plant you favour.

It can be tricky separating the worms from the castings even in the 3 tiered commercial worm farms. Generally speaking, if you cut off the food source from one section of your worm farm and transfer it to another, then the worms will migrate to the new food source. In a bath tub you can use one end and then the other.

It doesn't matter if there are worms left in with the castings. These will hopefully survive and go on to process mulch material where the castings were used. The vast majority of worms will be in the section of worm farm where the new food supply is and they will rapidly replace the lost worms through breeding.

Good luck and happy worm farming!

© Pam Connell