

# WORM FARMS

## FACT SHEET

Worm farming, called “vermiculture”, is similar to composting. In a composting system, there are many soil creatures recycling food and garden waste back into the soil. However, in a worm farm, the main worker is the humble worm.

Worm farms are easy to set up and maintain. Worms can be bred easily at home or at school and can be used to recycle organic waste from your kitchen into valuable fertiliser.

### BUILDING THE FARM

1. Buy or build a worm farm suitable for your needs. There are large and small farms, suitable for balconies, indoors or outdoors.
2. Buy your compost worms- tiger worms or red wigglers. Ask about suppliers when buying your worm farm, look in the Yellow Pages under 'Worm Farms' or try your local hardware store.
3. Find a location for your farm. Worms enjoy cool, dark, moist conditions, so find a place in the shade out of the sun.
4. The bottom tray is used for catching water that comes through the worm farm. It is recommended you do not use the tap provided. Just put a bucket under the hole to catch the brown liquid coming out. Use the legs that come with the worm farm or use a crate to raise it.
5. The first tray with holes in the floor is the home base for the worms. Fill this up with good compost, wet it well and then put in your worms. This is their home. From here they will feed on the layers above them.
6. Now place the next tray (with holes), on top of the home tray. Ensure the bottom of the empty tray is touching the soil/compost in the home tray. If ever a gap appears between trays you must top up the home tray with some extra compost or potting mix. This contact ensures the worms can move easily between the home tray and the feeding tray.
7. Get a “worm blanket” or use an old hessian bag or piece of carpet to cover over the top of all fresh food scraps. When feeding the worm farm always lift out/up the worm blanket.
8. Feed the worms a couple of pages of wet shredded newspaper for 1 week until they adjust to their new home.
9. Collect fruit and vegetable scraps and peelings (avoid onions, garlic, citrus and meat), leftover breakfast cereals, cakes, biscuits & bread scraps, shredded paper, cardboard, tissues, crushed egg shells and leaf litter. Ensure any cardboard is soaked in water before adding to the farm.
10. Sprinkle a little wood ash, garden lime, or dolomite and blood and bone on the top layer from time to time. Once established, the worm farm will consume approximately 500 grams of scraps each day.
11. Every 2-3 weeks, empty the liquid fertiliser from the bottom tray, dilute it 1:10 and use on potted plants, gardens and lawns.
12. Once the worms have moved into the top working tray, castings from the lower tray can be harvested and added to garden beds or potted plants.

## TROUBLESHOOTING

### It smells!

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

Start by feeding the worms slowly and gradually build up the amount of food you feed them. Make sure the worm farm is well drained. If it's too wet, the worms may drown.

### Unwelcome visitors

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

- Keep a lid on your worm farm or keep a hessian bag, old carpet or cardboard cover over the food scraps to suppress smells and discourage unwelcome visitors.
- Rub a little Vaseline around each leg to prevent ants entering the worm farm. Ants also enjoy dry acidic conditions.
- Check that your worm farm is moist and add a sprinkling of wood ash, garden lime or dolomite to neutralise acidic conditions.

### I'm going on holidays

Unlike other pets, you can leave worm farms unattended for weeks at a time. Worms will happily eat wet shredded paper for up to 6 weeks!

### My worms won't multiply

Worms can double in population every 2-3 months in ideal conditions. They need to be kept cool (ideally 18 – 25°C) moist but not too wet, away from direct sunlight and be fed the right foods. Some foods such as fruits, grains and sugary foods tend to be acid forming. Worms will not live or breed well in acidic conditions.

- Keep your worm farm out of direct sunlight
- Make sure the farm/bed is covered so that it doesn't get too wet in the rain
- Ensure there is good drainage
- Sprinkle a handful of wood ash, garden lime or dolomite on the farm every few weeks to neutralise any acid.

### WORMS...

- are one of nature's ultimate recyclers
- can live for 15 years or more
- have both male and female reproductive organs
- have eggs that can survive dry and harsh conditions for long periods
- produce castings (worm poo!) which have a neutral pH (around 7)
- increase the amount of nutrient available to your plants by up to 10 times, increasing productivity of your soil.
- increase the level of essential microbial activity in the soil.
- can consume their own body weight in food every day.