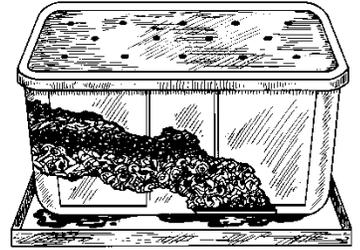


## Composting Indoors with a Worm Bin

If you don't have the ability to compost outside, you can still compost inside with a worm bin. Using a worm bin has several advantages. The composting material does not need to be turned; the worms do it for you. The bin is often located inside so you don't have to take a trip to the compost pile. The resulting compost is rich in plant micronutrients and helpful bacteria.



### What Kind of Worms Should I Get?

The most common type of worm in a worm bin is the red wiggler (*Eiseneia fetida*), also called the manure worm. The ideal number of worms in your bin depends upon the amount of 'worm food' you put in. The ideal worm: vegetative waste ratio is **2:1**. For example, if you generate 1/2 lb of vegetative waste per day, use 1 lb of worms. (There are approximately 1000 worms in a pound!)

### What Kind of Bin Should I Use?

Worm bins are typically made of wood or plastic and come in all different sizes. The size of the bin depends upon the amount of 'worm food' you produce. Add one square foot of bin surface area for each pound of vegetative waste produced in a week. Make sure that there are some holes in the bin to allow air flow. Don't forget holes for the bottom to let the liquid drain out. The worms like temperatures between 50 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, it is best to keep your worm box inside during the winter months.



### What Do Worms Eat?

Worms eat decaying fruit, vegetables and bacteria. Bacteria, fungi and other organisms in the bin also contribute to the degradation process. While milk and meat products do degrade, they can produce odors and attract pests. Therefore, they should be avoided in a worm bin.

Collect food waste in a covered container. Add food to one third of the bin every 5-7 days. Add the food to a different row each time. Start off slowly, adding just a few handfuls each time.

### What Else Should I Add to the Bin?

Besides food, worms need bedding. The bedding should be high in carbon and moist (about 60% moisture). Shredded newspaper, office paper, cardboard, or partially degraded leaves work well. Wet the bedding with water. Grab a handful and squeeze. If a few drops come out, the amount of water is about right (approximately 60% moisture). Fill 3/4 of the bin with moist bedding.

Sprinkle in a handful of soil or eggshells. This provides grit to aid the worms' digestion. A handful of finished compost or soil can speed the degradation process by adding helpful microorganisms.

## Harvesting Compost from Your Worm Bin

After approximately 4-6 months the compost is ready to be collected. To allow the material in the bin to further degrade, don't add food to the bin for one month. One method of harvesting the compost is to move it to one side of the bin. Then add new moist bedding and food waste to the empty side. Most of the worms will move to the new food in a few days - then simply removed the compost.

## Trouble Shooting Your Worm Bin

### Odors

If the bin is too wet, the degradation process may become anaerobic which leads to odors. To prevent this, add dry bedding if more than a few drops of water can be squeezed from the bedding.

### Fruit Flies

Fruit flies are the most common pest in a worm bin. They are attracted to yeast and rotting fruit. Flies can be avoided, or at least minimized, by burying the food waste 2 inches below the bedding. Another way to avoid fruit flies is to use a bin with small air holes that flies can't get through. Once the flies are present, stop putting food in the bin for approximately three weeks. The worms can survive over a month without adding food to the bin, but fruit flies cannot.

## For More Information on Yardwaste or Worm Bin Composting...

If you want to know more about composting and ways to make good compost, consult books or gardening magazines, call your county Cooperative Extension office or visit Cornell Waste Management Institute's comprehensive website at <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/smallscale.htm>.

### Call or write to:

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
Division of Materials Management  
Bureau of Waste Reduction & Recycling  
625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233-7253  
(518) 402-8706

### or email us at:

[recycling@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:recycling@gw.dec.state.ny.us)

### and check out our web page at:

[www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8801.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8801.html)

