



## How to Make a Wormery

Worm composting is a fantastic and natural way of recycling all your vegetable scraps, banana skins and tea bags from your kitchen. It's really easy to make a wormery! Just follow the simple steps below. Children will need adult supervision.

### What you need...

- Around 400 compost worms (often called tiger or brandling worms). They are available from the internet ([www.wormsdirect.co.uk](http://www.wormsdirect.co.uk) is one example), farmers' muck heaps or a fishing shops (however, worms from a fishing shop may not be the most healthy worms!).
- A plastic bin.
- A plastic tap.
- Some gravel/polystyrene pieces.
- Some small pieces of wood/permeable bag.
- Some bedding material (for the worms!)

### How to make your wormery...

1. Select a suitable bin (around 25 litres is ideal).
2. Drill some breathing holes into the lid of the bin.
3. Drill a tap into the bin below the gravel. You can buy taps from most hardware or garden shops.
4. Place 8cm of gravel/polystyrene at the bottom of the bin for drainage.
5. Line the bin with a permeable bag so that the compost can be emptied out more easily. Remember, liquid must be able to pass through the bag or the worms will drown. Plastic is no good. Alternatively, you can place wooden slats on top of the gravel/polystyrene, to separate the drainage material from the compost you are going to produce.
6. In the bag or on top of the wooden slats, put down 4 inches of damp bedding material. An old grow-bag is ideal, or you could use shredded newspaper or straw.

## Next steps...

Once you have built your wormery, dig a small hollow in the bedding material and place the worms inside. Then you can start adding your food waste. Try to make sure the food is not too large. There are two main ways of feeding the worms:

1. Place the food scraps on the surface of the bedding in a layer (up to 2 inches deep), but never cover the whole surface as the worms need a small area to escape if conditions get unpleasant.
2. Alternatively you can bury small batches of food scraps in the bedding, around the bin. Some people prefer this way as they feel the waste is covered up and is out of the way of the flies.

With both methods you need to keep a thick sheet of moist newspapers over the surface to keep the light out and moisture in. Only add more food when the worms have finished their last lot. The speed the food is processed will depend on the number of worms, the time of year (temperature) and the type of food added.

### **CAUTION...**

Never overfeed the wormery.  
The food will just rot, upsetting the worms and making nasty smells!



You can keep your worm bin outside but in winter, the worms will be warmer (and hungrier) if you keep them inside a garage or shed. After a few weeks you should be able to collect some liquid through the tap. You can use this as a liquid feed for your plants.

### **IMPORTANT:**

This liquid feed is too powerful to be used neat. Dilute the liquid before you put it onto your plants by a ratio of approximately 10:1.

When you empty the bin take off the top few inches where the worms will be living, remove all the other composted material below then put the material from the top back in the bottom of the wormery and start again!

## What can I put in my wormery?

<b>Worms Like</b> 	<b>Worms Don't Like</b> 
<p><b>Egg shells</b> (worms need calcium and egg shells are an excellent way of supplying this and keeping the bin from getting too acidic)</p> <p><b>Coffee grounds</b> and tea bags</p> <p><b>Cereals</b></p> <p><b>Baked beans</b></p> <p><b>Fruit</b></p> <p><b>Cooked potatoes</b></p> <p><b>Cheese</b></p> <p><b>Tomatoes</b></p> <p><b>Bread</b></p> <p><b>Rice or pasta</b></p> <p><b>Vegetable peelings</b></p> <p><b>Salad</b></p>	<p><b>Meat and fish</b> (worms will eat these but they are best avoided as they tend to smell and attract rats and flies)</p> <p><b>Grass</b> in any quantity (heats up and gives off ammonia, both of which will kill worms)</p> <p><b>Weed seeds</b></p> <p><b>Diseased plant material</b></p> <p><b>Cat/dog faeces</b> (these contain human parasites)</p> <p><b>Too much acidic food</b> (oranges, lemons, onions)</p>

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **I have lots of tiny flies in my worm bin. Is this a health risk?**  
No. These are probably fruit flies, which commonly occur on rotting fruit and vegetables. A tight fitting lid will help to exclude them. Also, if you bury the vegetable waste as you add it, or keep it covered with damp newspaper, they are less likely to be a problem. Flies do not harm the compost, although they can be irritating and offensive to some people.
- **I am going on holiday. Will my worms die if not fed?**  
An established worm bin can be left for up to four weeks with no adverse effects if you feed the worms well before you leave. Left for longer periods the worm population would slowly decline. You may like to leave the tap open when you go on holiday to stop the liquid building up. The worms can drown if there's too much liquid.

- **I have masses of tiny white worms in my worm compost. Are they a problem?**

These are probably pot worms (enchytraeids). They do a similar job to brandling worms and are nothing to worry about; you find them in most worm bins. They are very tolerant of waterlogged/acid conditions. If you find them proliferating and your worms are getting fewer, improve the drainage. Mixing in some shredded newspaper will help. You can also add a sprinkling of calcified seaweed or rock limestone (dolomite) to correct the acidity.

Newly hatched brandling worms are also whitish and only half an inch long. You can distinguish them from pot worms by their pinkish coloured blood vessel.

- **I opened my worm bin to find hundreds of worms around the lid. Why is this?**

Either they have run out of food or the conditions in the bin have become unsuitable for them. Worms hate waterlogged, acidic compost. Piling in a thick layer of kitchen waste so that it begins to putrefy and exclude the air will cause this sort of problem.

Adding fresh green materials that heat up as they decompose will also kill worms or drive them away.

Plastic worm bins do not always allow enough drainage from the compost; make sure that liquids are not collecting in the bottom of the bin to flood the compost.

- **The contents of my worm bin are mouldy. Am I doing something wrong?**

No. This can happen as vegetable waste starts to decompose. It will not harm the worms and should soon disappear. Turning the waste into the bedding with a small fork can help.



For further help or information:

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