

Dear Worm Wrangler,

Here are the most important issues concerning the care and feeding of your worms.

About the Bin

A bin large enough to accommodate the amount of kitchen scraps you or your family accumulates in a week, roughly an 18-24 gallon tub. You need 1/4" holes all around the top 3 inches of the bin and one 1/8" hole at each bottom corner for drainage.

Drill 1/4" 20-30 holes in the lid as well. Cutting out a small area of the lid and gluing in some sunshade or screen-door material with contact cement would be even better. This would allow you keep the lid on tight and still get adequate airflow in the bin.

The bedding base should be 4"-6" of newsprint (no color or glossy) that has been soaked and squeezed out . Mix this with some oyster shell flour or finely crushed eggshells (for grit) and a couple handfuls of garden soil or finished compost (this adds bacteria which is food for the worms). If available, adding a little moistened

aged horse manure would also be helpful.

Adding Worms & Temp Tips

Add your worms to the bedding and leave them alone for a week to get used to their new environment. The worms will be pretty much self-sustaining as long as they have enough feedstock, the bin gets enough air and moisture and the bin temperature doesn't get over 85 degrees.

A worm's temperature range of 40-90 degrees are bin temperatures, not air temps. Summer temps may reach over 100, but most bins, inside or outside (in the shade) should safely remain at or slightly above 80 degrees. Adding blocks of frozen food scraps will help cool the bin environment. Keeping an inexpensive thermometer in the bin would be helpful during temperature spikes or drops.

Food and Feeding

After a week, you can start placing food scraps in one area of the bin. This includes most fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee and tea grounds along with filters, but no meat, dairy, fat or pet manure.

Cover it with a layer of bedding material as this will prevent fruit flies, and gnats from hatching and becoming a nuisance.

(Caution: go easy on sugary fruits as these can release alcohols as they ferment which could kill the worms.)

The next week, if the worms have eaten most of the prior week's food, then add the new food next to, not on top of the old feed, cover with more bedding material.

If the worms are still working on the old food, do not add more food. Wait a week and recheck to see how they are doing. Most problems arise when too much food is placed in the bin.

If it seems like they're not going through the food fast enough, then try chopping or grinding up the scraps and see if that makes a difference. Watch that chopping up the feed won't release too much water into the bed, you don't want it getting wet, just moist.

Pull back the top layer every once in a while and see how the worms are doing. Most composting worms will be found in the top 2-3" of the bin once they start feeding.

It's best to keep adding feedstock until you get to within 2-3" from the top of the bin.

At that point, stop feeding and wait until all the food is gone and you've got nothing but brown compost-looking material. Then it's time to harvest.

Options to Harvesting

You can dump the whole tub upside down on a tarp and mound it up in a sunny (but not hot sun) location. The worms will burrow down to the bottom to get away from the light.

During this time, you can place new bedding in the bin and add a few cupfuls of the compost to inoculate the bin with microbes.

After half an hour, you can start scooping compost from the mound until you come to worms. Stop and wait 15 minutes or so and do it again. Repeat until all you have is worms.

Return those worms back to their new bedding. Wait several days before starting to feed.

The other scenario is to only remove half the bin (harvesting that portion

as above) and insert a piece of chicken wire or hardware cloth for a divider. Add new bedding and feed to the empty side and return the first batch of worms. After about 2 days the rest of the worms in the remaining side will have migrated over to the new feed.

Now you can clean out the remaining old compost with very few worms to worry about.

Refill the second half with new bedding. You can keep the divider in or remove it as you decide.

Once you notice that you have A LOT of WORMS, then it's time to divide the squirm and start another bin.

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If you have any problems or questions, please email me.

Happy Worming!

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The Care and Feeding of Your Worm Squirm