

# Keys to Effective Red Worm Composting

**Light and Heat** — Put the worms in a cool, shady spot. Red worms are hardy, but they are very sensitive to direct light. Direct light can cause the worms considerable stress and even kill them if they are unable to escape from it. The optimum temperature range is 55° to 85°.

**Oxygen** — Your container should be relatively shallow; it is better to have more surface area than depth. This allows for oxygenation of the bin and also allows the worms to spread out more. A long plastic tub will be much better than a deep bucket. A customized inexpensive container will do. We drill small holes in the bottom, sides, and lid for both drainage and air. (A 1/8" drill bit will make holes big enough for air and drainage but small enough to prevent the worms from escaping).

Of course, if you have a big enough yard, a good old-fashioned hole will do just fine. Dig a long hole deep enough for the worms, bedding, and any waste that you will be adding. A rectangular shape permits maximum productivity.

**Bedding** — You can use our composted manure, which serves as a bed and breakfast for the red worms. They are accustomed to living in and eating this. This is the most efficient way to ensure vitality for the worms and low maintenance for you! Be sure to keep the material moist by watering lightly every few days as needed. Shredded cardboard, newspaper, or aged straw will also provide a healthy bedding. A good ratio per pound of worms is 3 cups soil to 2 pounds shredded paper.

**Water: not too much!** — The medium in which your worms live should be moist, like a damp sponge. That is, if you squeeze it, being careful not to squeeze your worms, a couple of drops of water should come out.

## Troubleshooting (Exodus)

If your worms begin to leave their home in large numbers, you will know something is not right about the contents of the bin. Try modifying the amount of food you put in, the water content, and the balance of carbon containing elements (paper, straw, brown dry plant matter) and nitrogen-containing elements (green plant matter, urine).

## What to toss in the bin: YES's and NO's

It is best to add only a small amount of food at a time (1-2 cups in an average sized bin) and allow the worms to digest it before adding more food. Keep our food scraps in an extra container prior to placing them in your bin. The worms will actually like the food better once it has decomposed a bit. Once you put it in the bin, it is best to cover the food with the bedding to minimize attracting insects. Also, make sure you do not add so much food that it creates too much heat in the bin or smothers the worms.

### YES

- Vegetable & fruit waste (citrus fruit should be added in moderation when using smaller bins)
- Starchy materials — bread, pasta, rice, potatoes — all in moderation (beginners may want to avoid these altogether initially)
- Aged animal manures (be careful with rabbit and poultry — need lots of bedding to balance). Make sure they are not too hot or they will kill the worms.
- Shredded newspaper, used paper towels (common sense applies here), cardboard. It's a great idea to add these carbon-rich materials at the same time you add any wet food waste.
- Egg shells (best if ground up and in moderation)
- Coffee grounds
- Tea bags

### NO

- Human/pet waste
- Non biodegradable materials, such as glass, metal, and plastics
- Dairy/meat
- Oils/grease
- Harsh chemicals