

HOW TO GAIN THE MOST FROM YOUR WORM FARM

Interesting facts:



Worms work upwards.
 1kg or 4000 worms cope with 1kg of scraps every 2-3 days.
 Grass clippings convert faster than food scraps.

Worms are just like us. Think of them as pets. If you're freezing, so are they; if you're sweltering so are they. So store the farm in a sheltered place and keep them moist. **SHADE AND MOISTURE** are critical for worms.

Worms hate solid rain as they think they are going to drown, so when rain starts to set in, place **DRY** grass or garden clippings or paper in the top of your worm farm to help them feel secure. Cover your worm farm over in constant rain or the worms will try to get out.



Smaller food breaks down faster. If you need your worms to convert a lot of waste quickly, you can soften it in the microwave first. Also throw in the water in which you have cooked the vegies, as the farm needs to be moist at all times.

Worms like a large surface area. They are photosensitive though (they don't like light) so place an old piece of carpet or thick cardboard over the top of your farm to protect them.

YES FOODS:

- ✓ most vegie scraps
- ✓ all fruit except citrus
- ✓ garden and grass clippings
- ✓ shredded paper and cardboard
- ✓ human hair
- ✓ most manure (unless the animal has recently been wormed)
- ✓ egg shells are ok but they don't break down and are left in the vermicast, so crush them before throwing them in
- ✓ tea leaves, tea bags, coffee grounds.



NO FOODS:

- ✗ meat, bones
- ✗ grains or bread
- ✗ dairy products
- ✗ onion, garlic, tomatoes
- ✗ citrus fruits
- ✗ solid newspapers (shred or crinkle them first).



Always use rubber gloves and a dust mask when dealing with worm farms. Sometimes mould in the material breaking down could contain airborne bugs such as Legionnaire's disease.

Worms need a pH Balance

Sprinkle garden lime or worm conditioner over the surface of the farm once a week to decrease acidity.

Holidays

DON'T load the farm with heaps of food if you're going away as it will go mouldy. *DO* place larger pieces of food in the farm as it will take longer to break down (eg whole apples instead of apple peel or core) and a little more lawn clippings and paper. Make sure there is plenty of moisture (not muddy).

Pests

Ants come for the food too but they don't convert; they simply eat. If you have ants around your worm farm, it is too dry. Eradicate ants by using borax, water or Vaseline around the ant entry point.



Throw *soldier fly larvae* (they look like little armadillos) out for the grubs to eat as they don't convert either.

If you have *Vinegar Fly* it means you are feeding your worms more than they can cope with.

If you have ordinary *flies* around your worm farm it is too wet.

Essentials:

- × Don't overfeed
- ✓ Use lime regularly to balance
- ✓ Mask food smells with grass clippings – healthy worms do not smell, rotting food smells!

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	REASON	SOLUTION
Worms die	Too acidic	Sprinkle with lime weekly.
	Lack of oxygenated material	Insert dry garden clippings and grass and, using rubber gloves, 'fluff up' the material in the top of the farm to get oxygen through it.
	Temperature extremes	Place farm in a sheltered place.
Flies around farm	Farm too moist	Add dry grass clippings and stop watering farm for a day or two.
Lots of ants	Farm too dry	Add water to farm to keep moist but not muddy.
Mouldy food	Worms don't like it	Throw it out into compost.
Worms leave home	Don't like the food	Avoid meat, bones, garlic, grains, dairy, onions and citrus plus anything else that is regularly left and not converted.
	It's raining or about to rain	Place a cover over the farm and add dry clippings.

When Choosing a Worm Farm:

1. Look at the capacity. How much food do you have to convert? Don't get a small farm as they become too hot and aren't worth the constant caretaking.
2. Look for a farm with a larger surface area for quicker results.
3. Make sure there is plenty of airflow – worms need oxygen.
4. Don't get farms that are too deep – worms can't make it up to the next level and drown.
5. Look for ease of use.



Vermiculture (worm farming) encourages native worms to proliferate.

For more information on worms and worm farming:

Contact the Waste Minimisation Officer on 4474 1029 or visit

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/downtoearth/worm.htm

(Information has been gathered from a number of sources including Impact Worm Farm, Queensland; Early Bird Worm Farms, Narooma; and Environmental Protection Authority.)