

MAKE YOUR OWN WORM FARM



More than 50% of the urban waste stream that goes to landfills comes from organic, largely, food waste.

This is a figure that each of us has some control over, and can ultimately reduce. For example, schools can reduce the amount of rubbish going to landfill by between 50-75% just by starting a composting programme. Similar reductions can be made in the home and business, making us all more responsible citizens.

Getting children involved in vermicomposting (that is, composting with worms) teaches them not only about recycling and resource management, but also instils an ethic of care about their environment – something we all need in order to become better custodians of the planet.

Composting worms, called Tiger worms, are different to the common earthworm you find in your garden. Because these special kind of worms have evolved to survive on rotting plant matter from the forest floor, they are perfect composters for organic food waste. Generally, about 1kg of worms (that's about 4000 worms) will eat about 5kg of food a week – each worm eating just about its own weight in food a day!

Here are some tips for making your own worm farm:

1 Practice your recycling skills by using an old fruit crate, an old bath, or recycled timber or steel to construct a bin about 60cm to 1m high, and about 1m² of surface area

2 The bin can sit either directly on the ground or it can have a bottom – the worms generally stay near the surface, so won't bury themselves in the ground

3 The worms need about 20cm deep of 'bedding' on the bottom such as peat moss, or broken down compost and old newspapers to retreat to. This needs to stay moist, so a "squeeze test" should release about 1 or 2 drops of water, and not more, otherwise it may be too wet for the worms

4 Once you have placed your worms on top of their bedding, place some food (kitchen scraps) on top for them and moisten with a little water

5 Next, place a sheet of black plastic (a rubbish bag will do), and then an old hessian sack, or piece of carpet to cover the surface of the bin

6 Feed your worms every day or every two days in different parts of the bin each time

7 Keep some Dolomite (or limescale) handy to sprinkle over the worm feed occasionally to ensure that it doesn't get too acidic in there for the worms – this will help to keep the pH level neutral

HARVESTING THE WORM COMPOST (VERMICAST)

The high quality compost that your worms will produce can be used as organic fertilizer in your garden that won't harm the environment like other fertilizers do. In short, composting helps to save valuable nutrients that would otherwise be buried in landfills all over the country, only leading to increased harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Come on, do your bit, and compost your organic and vege waste!

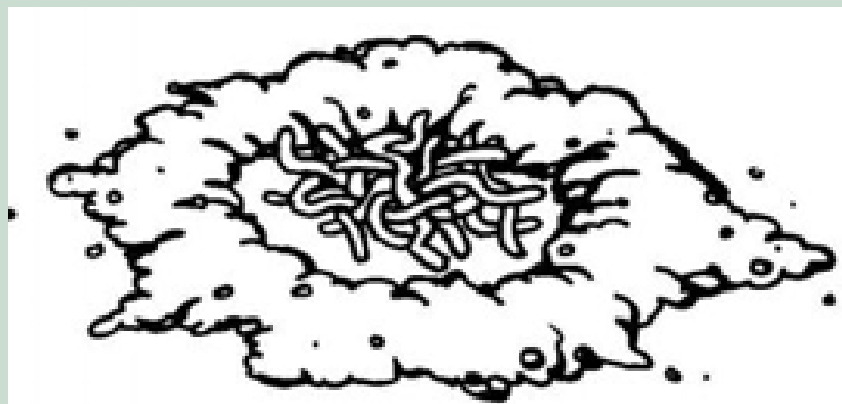
1. Feed only one side of your worm farm for two weeks before harvesting your vermicast. The worms will move to where the food is, which will ensure that most of the worms will move to the other side.



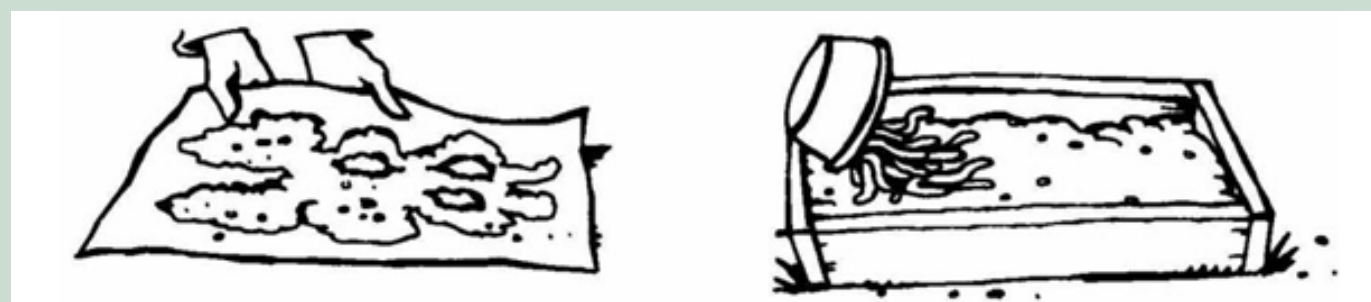
2. Dig out the vermicast from the unfed side and place in little piles on plastic sheeting in the sunlight. The worms will move away from the light and will burrow to the bottom of the pile.



3. Gently brush the vermicast from the top and sides of the pile and you should find any worms in a mass at the bottom of the pile.



4. Gently place the worms back into the worm bin, cover them and continue feeding them as normal



Use the vermicast as fertilizer around your gardens at home or school. Because it is a rich plant food it only needs to be sprinkled around plants on top of the soil, not dug in. You can always bag any remaining vermicast for future use, give it away or even sell it for fundraising!

FEEDING YOUR WORMS

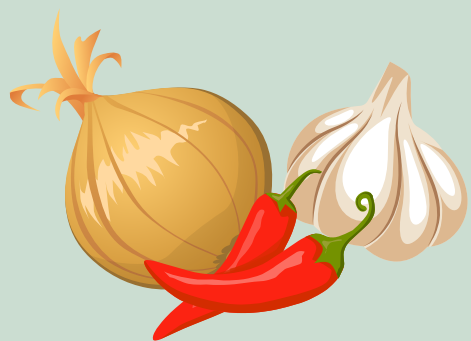
✗ DON'T FEED

Cooked food and baked goods



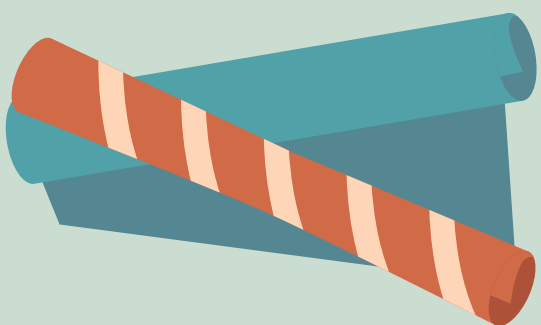
Flour products

Meat and dairy products



Spicy foods (chilli, garlic, and onion)

Garden waste

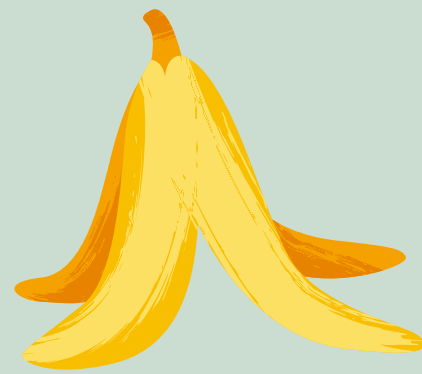


Waxed and coated papers

Citrus and acidic foods

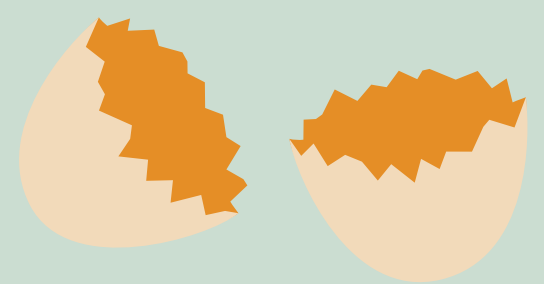


CAN FEED



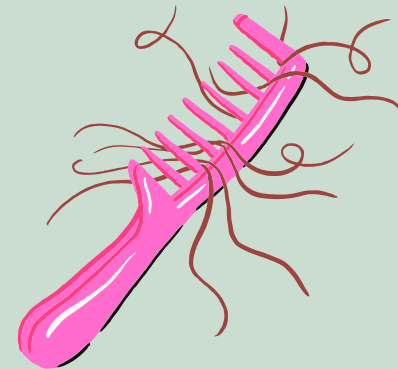
Most food and veggie scraps

Crushed egg shells



Coffee grinds and tea bags

Scrap paper, paper towels, tissues



Hair and nails

Old manure - ensure horses/cows have not been recently wormed



There are many easy ways nowadays to have your own worm farm at home to save you having to make one yourself. Check out the mightily awesome Hungry Bin (a NZ invention!), or your nearest Bunnings Warehouse or Mitre 10 for some alternative solutions.