



# Worm farming

## What?

Worm farming is a natural way to recycle fruit and vegetable waste

## Why?

- Over 50% of waste generated at home is organic matter which can be recycled
- Castings and liquid fertiliser from worm farms are high in nutrients and add much needed nourishment back into the soil creating healthier plants and gardens
- Worm farming produces 100% natural fertiliser so you don't have to buy expensive artificial fertilisers

## How?

1. Select a cool, well-shaded spot for your worm farm
2. Purchase a worm farm or save money and recycle by making your own (see below)
3. Prepare the bedding material: Shop bought worm farms usually come with a coconut fibre brick. Soak the brick in water as per the instructions and drain off excess water. Bedding material should be as moist as a damp sponge. To make your own bedding material, see instructions below
4. Worm farms usually have a number of trays. The trays with holes are the working trays and the tray without holes is the bottom tray that collects the liquid. To start with you will only need one working tray placed above the bottom tray. Place a few sheets of newspaper, or a piece of cardboard in the working tray and cover with a layer of bedding material approximately 10 cm thick on top
5. Add about 1000-2000 compost worms on top of the bedding material (wait for approximately 5 minutes until all the worms have disappeared down into the bedding)
6. Place a handful of fruit and vegetable scraps on top; ensure the scraps cover only half of the top surface area, leaving a non feeding space available.
7. Cover the worms with a damp piece of cardboard, shredded newspaper or hessian
8. Place the lid on the worm farm

Add small amounts of fruit and vegetables scraps once a week

## How to make your own worm farm

You will need:

1 x foam box with lid, 3 x house bricks, 2 x 2 litre plastic milk bottles with one side cut off, either a coconut fibre brick, or rich compost, dry grass clippings and shredded newspaper as the bedding material. You will also need half a bucket of water, a pen/pencil or chopstick and enough hessian or underfelt to cover the top of the worm farm

- When finished, the home made worm farm should sit on three bricks about 20cm apart. The cut plastic milk bottles can be placed on either side of the middle brick, acting as a harvest vessel for the rich liquid that falls from the worm farm
- To determine where to poke holes in the foam base (these are for aeration and drainage), place your box on the bricks and mark the area on the foam base that is directly above the milk bottles
- Using a pen/pencil or chopstick poke up to 6 small holes in 2 rows (at least 12 holes all up) where you have marked the box that sits above the milk bottles
- To make the bedding material tear up about 12 sheets of newspaper into strips, soak them in half a bucket of water with the old grass clippings and a generous handful of rich compost
- Once soaked drain off excess water
- Place a few sheets of newspaper at the bottom of the box and add a 10cm layer of the newspaper/grass clipping/compost mixture
- Follow steps 5-8 as above to complete your home made worm farm



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### Where to go?

Worm farms can be purchased from some Councils, hardware stores and nurseries. To buy worms look under "worms" in the Yellow Pages for local suppliers

### What to feed worms

Worms love fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, teabags, egg shells and small amounts of dampened paper and cardboard. Do not feed worms meat, dairy products, onion, garlic, citrus fruits or animal droppings. The trick to healthy worms is a diversity of food and all in moderation. Chopping up the food scraps you feed your worms speeds up decomposition and makes it easier for the worms to get through the waste

### How much will it cost?

The cost to set up a worm farm is up to you. You can save money and make your own or spend a bit more and purchase a ready made system

Manufactured worm farms generally retail at approximately \$90 and worms can cost up to \$60 for 1000

### Troubleshooting?

#### Smelly worm farm

A healthy worm farm has an earthy smell. If your worm farm has an unpleasant odour you may be feeding your worms too much or it may be too wet. If your worm farm is too wet make sure drainage holes are clear and add some dry waste such as shredded newspaper or dried grass clippings

#### Unwelcome critters

To avoid unwanted visitors such as flies and cockroaches ensure your worm farm is well sealed with a lid and a cover over your worms. Problems with vinegar flies can be fixed by adding lime, wood ash or dolomite. Ants in your worm farm may mean your worm farm is too dry; add some water if this is the case

#### How to use castings and liquid fertiliser

Castings can be used with sand in a potting mixture, as a top dressing, a seed raising mix for vegetables or placed on the soil around your favourite plant. To make liquid fertiliser, dilute fluid from the worm farm with 50% water (the colour should resemble weak tea). Remember to use castings and liquid fertiliser sparingly on natives

### Want to know more?

Download a *How to Worm Farm Easy Guide*

<http://www.resource.nsw.gov.au/publications.htm#easyguide>

Attend a workshop run by your local council:

Camden	4654 7777
Campbelltown	4645 4000
Liverpool	1300 36 2170
Wollondilly	4677 1100
Macarthur Centre for Sustainable Living	4647 9828