

Q & A – COMPOST WORMS

HOW MUCH FOOD WILL MY WORMS EAT?

It is generally said that worms can eat their body weight in a day. Therefore if you have 1000 worms (250g) then you would feed those 250g per day. Due to their population growth after a couple of months you would expect to have doubled the amount and then you would be able to increase the feeding.

WHAT SHOULD I FEED MY WORMS?

Fruit and veges scraps from the kitchen are fine, cutting the food into smaller pieces is preferred, and pulp from your juicer even better. Worms will generally not eat very acidic food like citrus peel and onions until their preferred food is eaten first.

If manure is fed to the worms be aware of the source. Manures often have vermicides still active in it from the animals having been treated to kill parasitic worms in the animal. This can kill all your worms in a few hours. It is recommended that any manures being fed to your worms need to be well aged before use.

HOW CAN I KEEP MY WORMS HAPPY?

Don't over feed your worms. Keep a check on the feed that has been given, and do not just keep piling it on top. Place the food in the central area of the unit and leave an air gap around the edge of about 5cm. Every couple of weeks sprinkle over a small amount of pH balancer and water in lightly – be careful not to apply directly to the worms themselves.

CAN I FEED MY WORMS GARDEN WASTE?

Not really. Worm farms are designed for soft organic waste to be broken down. Garden waste is best used in your garden compost area where it will break down over a period of time to generate good compost for general use in your garden.

DO I NEED TO WATER MY WORMS?

Rain water is best for your worms, if on town supply then leave some water in a bucket open to the air for a while for any chlorine to dissipate before using on the worms.

Watering your worms regularly, every week or so, keeps them happy and promotes the production of liquid fertiliser. Any water added to 'THE SWAG' simply filters through and into your bucket underneath ready for you to apply to your garden. If you use the tray system then it is important to ensure that the tap is open when watering with a container ready to collect the liquid, if not your worms could drown.

Any paper or cardboard added to your system should be pre-soaked before being added. Placing a moist hessian bag or newspaper on top of the fresh feed will encourage the worms to feed as they will not come up into the light, preferring a damp dark covering.

WHAT SHOULD I NEVER GIVE MY WORMS?

Never add anything that contains any sort of chemicals, prepared fertilisers or super phosphate. Avoid meat, bones, and dairy products as these may encourage flies and maggots. Do not add any excess of onion scraps, citrus fruit or red capsicums – small amounts finely chopped mixed with other feed may be acceptable.

WILL MY WORM POPULATION GET TOO MANY FOR MY WORM FARM?

Worms are amazing creatures and are able to self regulate their population to their space and available food. You will never have too many worms for your unit.

CAN I PUT MY COMPOST WORMS IN THE GARDEN?

If you can provide a thick layer of moist garden mulch in your garden beds then compost worms should survive. They need continuous moist conditions unlike earthworms that will go elsewhere to find moisture.

WHAT IS THE BEST TEMPERATURE FOR MY WORMS?

Worms tolerate a wide temperature range from about 10C to 30C. If the temperature of your unit gets too high then you can always run a bit of extra water through the unit to cool down the contents and help protect your worms. Remember if you have a tray system to have the drainage tap turned to open and a bucket ready to collect the liquid fertiliser.

In a colder climate place your unit in a protected area away from frosts and if necessary cover with old blankets to keep warmth in the unit. Feeding them more food waste will generate extra warmth as it decomposes.

WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE TO PUT MY WORM FARM?

Ideally your worm farm unit should be placed in a shady cool spot to avoid high temps particularly during summer. 'THE SWAG' is great hanging under a shady tree or a veranda, but be aware of afternoon sun in summer particularly. Similarly your tray system needs to be in a shady spot not too cool or hot to keep temperatures in the middle range.

WHAT DO I DO IF THE WORMS GATHER ON THE LID OR TOP?

Worms are showing their sensitivity to pressure changes in the weather, this usually happens before a storm or rain in preparation for a flood. Take them off the lid and return to the bedding.

WHAT ARE THE LITTLE WHITE WORMS IN MY FARM?

These could be your new baby compost worms, but there are other small white worms that appear at times called entrachydids. They are not harmful to your compost worms but they do indicate that the conditions are becoming acidic. To combat this treat with a pH balancer powder by sprinkling over and lightly watering in.

Placing a slice of dampened bread in the unit will entice the white worm to the area for ease of removal. Sometimes other organisms may appear like mites or other larvae, these assist the decomposition of organic matter and do not generally cause any concern.

WILL MY WORM FARM ATTRACT FLIES OR SMELL?

Your worm farm will be fly proof against household flies with the cover in place. The very small vinegar fly (similar looking to the fruit fly) may get in to your worm farm. If these increase in number it indicates that there is too much food being left uneaten and that you are over feeding your worms. This could lead to odours occurring. Simply reduce the amount of daily feed to what can be consumed and the vinegar flies should disappear.

CAN I USE MY WORM FARM AS AN ANIMAL MANURE CONVERTER?

Worm farm units can work well converting animal manures into good quality liquid fertiliser and castings. The processing by your compost worms eliminate bad bacteria (ecoli) and produce natural fertiliser usable in your garden.

The quantity of worms required depends on the size and number of dog's waste being used. For each small to medium dog between 500-1000 worms and for each large dog about 1000 worms would be needed.

When converting animal manure you will need to use a separate unit, do not mix your vege/fruit scraps in with the manure. They do not mix well together.

WHY ARE THE WORMS STAYING IN THE LOWER LEVEL OF MY TRAYS?

If worms have moved down to the collector tray at the bottom of your system you can give them a means to move upwards by placing a small container on a newspaper and also covered by newspaper upside down in the bottom tray. This will give the worms a means to move up to the next level and eliminate their drowning.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I GO ON HOLIDAYS?

If you are unable to feed your worm farm for a period of a time – going away for a few weeks for example – just give them a large feeding and include some larger pieces of fruit or veges for your worms to chew through.

Placing a soaked newspaper over the internal mat cover which is on top of your feed will give extra protection to the bedding dehydrating too much while you are away.

For the tray systems ensure that it is left in a cool location under cover, and leave a container underneath with the tap open for any liquid to drain through and not build up.

HAPPY WORM FARMING