



Riverwoods Preservation Committee

A group of resident volunteers dedicated to preserving the ecological heritage of the community

Composting with Worms! A Perfect Winter Project

Although it's only January, does the winter already seem to have gone on too long?

Are you already dreaming about your summer garden? Composting with worms is an easy winter project that will benefit not only your summer garden but the greater environment as well.

Why worms?

Worms can spin flax into gold, so to speak. If you feed your daily vegetable scraps and your shredded paper to hungry red wiggler worms, by summer your garden will have spectacular, nutritious vermicompost (that's worm poop in lay terms) and you will have kept numerous bags of garbage out of the waste stream.

Just as soil bacteria feed on the grass clipped by your mulching mower, or as the soil fungi eat the leaves and twigs on the forest floor and break them down into micro nutrients, worms can eat your vegetable waste and transform it into food for your garden or houseplants.

It's easy!

1. Purchase the wigglers.

To get started, all you need is a pound or two of red wiggler worms, available from bait shops and web sites.

2. Build a compost container.

An easy worm home uses two plastic containers that stack, one inside the other, plus one lid. Drill the lid, body and floor of the upper container with air holes to provide oxygen for the worms. Put bedding, like straw or shredded paper, lightly moistened, in the bin and add the worms. The bottom container will hold excess moisture which drips from the holes in the floor of the top bin.

3. Add veggie scraps to the upper container.

Feed your worms weekly (no meat, bones or onions) and add dry bedding to maintain the moisture of a wrung-out sponge. Keeping a proper moisture level will involve a little trial and error. Too little and the worms can actually

dry out; too much will encourage the growth of damaging anaerobic bacteria. Properly kept, there is no odor. So you can house your worms in a closet, the basement or any place that maintains a temperature between 45 and 80 degrees.

4. Harvest the compost for house plants or gardens.

In summer, separate the worms from the compost. (A pair of rubber kitchen gloves is great for the squeamish.) The compost can be added directly to the garden or diluted with water for compost tea which is wonderful for houseplants.

To learn more, check out *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Appelhof, download the Perdue Extension pdf document, *Household Composting with Worms*, or visit the Shedd Aquarium web site at www.sheddaquarium.org/worm_composting.html for a beautiful, illustrated and very detailed explanation.

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