

What is worm composting?

Worms are composting pros. They love kitchen scraps and leftovers and can chomp through their own bodyweight in scraps every day. Their waste is rich in nutrients and perfect for fertilising garden and container plants.

Worm composting, or worm farming, is cheap and easy – a great activity to do with the kids.

A well-maintained wormery won't smell or attract flies.

This guide explains how to set up a worm farm, how to maintain it, and how to use the compost (vermicast or worm castings) and worm tea in your garden.

Let's get started!



Advice

Do...

- Add a couple of handfuls of soil – to aid digestion
- Feed small amounts daily
- Give a variety of foods
- Chop food scraps into smaller pieces to speed up the process
- Lightly sprinkle with lime if your farm is too acidic - you'll notice this if little white pot worms are present
- Keep your worms in the dark
- Provide extra insulation in winter – worms don't generate heat
- Lightly cover fresh food with bedding material to discourage flies

Don't...

- Give grass clippings or garden rubbish – it heats too quickly
- Overfeed – this restricts air flow, making conditions toxic

What are those?

If you see small yellow/pink oval-shaped cocoons – **congratulations!** Your worms are having babies!



For more information email wheeliebins@ccc.govt.nz, phone **03 941 8999**, or visit

— A guide to — **worm** composting



Setting up

Find your containers

It's fun to make your own wormery in an old bath or tub, a wooden or plastic crate, even a stack of old car tyres.

You'll need two containers, one for the worms (make sure it has a drainage hole) and one to collect the liquid, or 'worm tea'.

If you're not into DIY, most hardware stores and garden centres sell ready-made worm farms.



Choose your site

Find a shady spot outside or inside.

Worms don't like it too hot or too cold, 12–25 degrees celsius will be about right.

Get your worms

The best worms for this mahi are Tiger Worms (*Eisenia fetida*), also known as Red Wigglers.

An online search will show you where to buy them locally.

If you know someone with a worm farm, they may be willing to part with some of their worms to get you started.



Prepare the worm environment

Shred and soak newspaper.

Squeeze out some of the moisture.

Spread across the bottom of your wormery container.

(You can also use leaves or straw with a few handfuls of soil.)

Before the container gets too heavy, put the liquid collection container under the drainage hole.

Add food scraps

Worms thrive on variety.

On the menu

Most vegetables	✓
Most fruits	✓
Tea leaves	✓
Coffee grounds	✓
Egg shells	✓

Off the menu

Onion and garlic	✗
Citrus fruits	✗
Meat	✗
Bread	✗
Cooking oils	✗
Dairy foods	✗

Add your worms

Put the worms on the fresh food scraps.

Cover the worms and food with moist shredded newspaper to discourage flies.



Keep them happy

Worms like a dark, moist (not wet) environment – not too hot and not too cold.

Cover the worms and food with an insulating layer – something heavy, such as a piece of old carpet. Add an extra layer in winter.

Harvest your compost

In a few months you'll see worm castings (vermicast), a dark brown soil-like material – this is the compost.

To separate the castings from the food scraps and worms, put fresh food to one side for a few days.

The worms will gradually move across to the fresh food.

Remove the castings.

Place fresh bedding (moist shredded newspaper) in the empty space.

Empty the worm tea into containers.

Using your harvest

The worm castings are ready to use.

Castings

Work into the soil around garden plants.

Spread over the soil for container plants.

Worm tea

Dilute before use to avoid burning your plants (one part worm tea to 10 or more parts water)

Use a sprayer or watering can to water foliage and around drip lines.