

Worm Bin

A worm bin is a fun and easy way to watch worms “recycle” food waste. Here’s how to set up and keep a worm bin:

1. **Order worms.** Order red worms from a worm farm in your area or buy them from a bait shop. Be sure to ask for “red wigglers.” (Native earthworms will not thrive in a worm bin. Do not release red worms into the environment. They are an invasive species.)
2. **Choose a container.** You may use a plastic tub with a lid, a wooden bin, or other container. A good size for a classroom is a 5- to 10- gallon container, or one approximately 24” x 18” x 8”. It should be no more than 18” deep.
3. **Prepare the container.** Rinse out the container before using it. Drill holes in the bottom of it and on the sides to allow for air flow and drainage. Cover it with a loose-fitting lid. Place a tray underneath it to catch moisture. Fill the bin about three-quarters full with moistened bedding such as shredded newspaper or office paper, dry leaves, straw, or sawdust. The bedding should be as wet as a squeezed-out sponge and no wetter. Add a handful of soil.
4. **Add the worms.** After putting the worms in the bin, place it in an area that will not get over 90° F in the summer or freeze in the winter. The bin can be kept indoors in a dark cupboard or closet, or in a protected area outdoors. Give the worms a day or two to settle in before feeding them.
5. **Feed the worms.** You may feed the worms raw fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds and filters, and tea bags. Do not feed them meat, dairy products, greasy or oily foods, grains or pet wastes. To feed the worms, bury the food under a handful of bedding.
6. **Keep the worms healthy.** Worms require cool, consistent temperature, dark moist (not wet) places to live. You may need to remove the lid periodically to moderate moisture and temperature. You may add small amounts of food every day or a couple of times a week. Add moistened bedding as needed to keep the bin three-quarters full.
7. **Use the compost.** After several months, you will see a dark layer of castings on the bottom of the bin. To remove this “vermicompost” without removing the worms, feed the worms on only one side of the bin for a few weeks. The worms will move to that side of the bin, enabling you to remove the compost from the empty side. Use the compost to fertilize house plants or garden plants.

Note: You may want to post a note on the worm bin telling the custodian not to remove the bin or spray for pests near it. For more information on vermi- composting visit <http://compost.css.cornell.edu/worms/wormhome.html>.