



# Useful Information about Worm Care

## What is so good about worms?

Worms are the ultimate pet! They don't bark at night and we don't have to exercise them. All we have to do is create a nice environment for them to live in and then feed them. Worms will eat large amounts of organic material and convert it into a nutrient rich organic fertiliser and soil conditioner called vermicast.

For information on building or purchasing a Council subsidised worm farm or special home composting offers go to <http://www.qldc.govt.nz/Default.aspx?tabid=196>.

## Worm care tips

### Moisture



Worms like to live in moist conditions. You will be able to see if your worms are not happy as they will become slow and limp so add a little water if you think they look dry or if they have food or soil sticking to their bodies. Ensuring your worms have sufficient moisture is vital to their survival. Worms have no lungs and take in oxygen through their skin. If a worm dries out it will suffocate<sup>1</sup>.

### Light



Worms are sensitive to light and will not come up to the surface to eat unless a non transparent cover has been placed on top of the food layer to keep the light out. You could use newspaper, old carpet or cardboard to make a cover.

### Temperature



Worms do not like to get too hot or too cold; the ideal temperature is 12 to 18 degrees<sup>2</sup>. Here are some handy hints for caring for your worms in the summer and winter months:

#### Summer

- Do not place your worms in direct sunlight. A perfect location for your worms is under a deciduous tree which will provide shade in summer and allow sunlight through as it drops its leaves during winter;
- Check moisture levels and add a little water when required to keep conditions moist.

#### Winter

- Place an old piece of carpet or polystyrene on the top off the food layer to help insulate your worms;
- Place an old blanket over your worm farm to help keep them warm and stop them from freezing;
- Place your worm farm in a sunny spot during winter.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thelearningworm.com/worm-facts.php>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bucketofworms.co.uk/worms.html>



## What do worms like to eat?

Worms like to have a varied diet. They like to have a mixture of fruit and vegetables and carbon containing materials such as paper, cardboard and leaves. Worms do not have teeth so they prefer their food in smaller pieces; however once large pieces for food such as potatoes and pumpkins become soft worms will love them.

### Worms love to eat:

- ✓ Raw fruit and vegetables
- ✓ Cardboard, shredded and soaked in water
- ✓ Paper
- ✓ Leaves
- ✓ Hair
- ✓ Egg shells
- ✓ Tea bags and coffee filters/grounds

### Worms aren't so keen on:

- ✗ Cooked food
- ✗ Meat
- ✗ Grease and fats
- ✗ Dairy products
- ✗ Large quantities of garden waste, especially lawn clippings

## Remember!

**Cool + Darkness + Moisture + Food = Healthy worms**

## Vermicast

Vermicast is produced by worms feeding. It is a rich, dark compost that is a very nutritious plant food. Vermicast can be used directly on seedlings, potted plants or your garden. You can also use it like mulch and dig it directly into your garden or spread over your lawn to help condition your soil.

### *Did you know?*

**It can take a gardener up to 240 days to make a fine grade of compost. But worms can make vermicompost in just thirty days<sup>3</sup>.**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How much organic material do worms eat?

Worms will generally eat their own weight daily. The rate may slow down during cooler months.

### Why is food sticking to my worms?

If food or other materials are sticking to your worms the environment is likely to be too dry; a little water should be added.

### Why aren't my worms eating?

If your worm bin is new they may still be eating their bedding (initial layer of food such as compost, shredded newspaper or straw) materials. Food scraps need to break down and become soft first before your worms can digest them; this can take anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks. If your worms have suddenly stopped eating it is likely that a food they don't like has been fed to them. Worms will also reduce the amount of food they consume in lower temperatures.

<sup>3</sup> Nancarrow, L and Hogan Taylor J, The Worm Book, 1998, p.95. Ten Speed Press, California.

### **My worms are escaping, why?**

If you have created the right environment for your worms they shouldn't want to leave. Check your worms have enough food to eat, do not have too much light or water and have enough air circulation and moisture.

### **Why are my worms dying?**

When worms get too hot, too dry or too acidic they will die. Move your worm farm to a shadier area and make sure there is sufficient moisture. Adding a little lime to the farm will help to control the acidity levels which may occur as a result of excessively high moisture. To help absorb excess moisture add shredded newspaper, straw or twiggy garden material.

### **Why does my worm farm smell?**

Worm farms generally smell if there is a lack of air circulation or excess water. Identify and remove the cause of the smell and add more shredded paper, leaves, cardboard or twiggy green waste to improve the air circulation and absorb moisture. If the smell is all through the worm farm you could try mixing the bedding around to improve air circulation. Using a few different types of bedding materials such as shredded paper, straw and leaves helps with air circulation also. You may be feeding your worms too much, only feed in thin layers of 3 or 4 centimetres.

### **My worm farm is a swamp, what am I doing wrong?**

Has there been a large amount of rain of late? Or have watery foods such as cucumber or watermelon been fed to your worms? You need to work out how the water got into your worm farm.

If it was from a wet food then remove the food, if it was from the rain you may need to relocate your worm farm to a drier position or cover it when heavy rain is expected. Excess water could also be caused due to a lack of air circulation.

### **I'm going on holiday; will my worms need to be fed whilst I'm away?**

Make sure you feed them plenty of food before you leave; a mixture of food, paper and leaves will help sustain them for 2 to 3 weeks. If you are going to be away for more than 3 weeks it is recommended you have someone to feed your worms for you.

### **There are pests in and around my worm farm, what can I do to prevent them?**

**Ants:** Usually appear when your worm farm is too dry. Its time to water your worm farm.

**Flies:** Are attracted to moisture, it is likely your worm farm is too wet. Cover the food with a layer of shredded newspaper.

**Fruit flies:** Generally appear if a lot of sugary foods, such as fruit, are in your worm farm such as fruit. You could try to remove the excess food and mix in leaves and shredded paper.

#### **Want more information?**

For further information on worm farming and worm care try your local library or try searching the internet. Here are a few websites to get you started:

**Zero Waste New Zealand Trust:** <http://www.zerowaste.co.nz/default,499.sm>

**Organic Waste Solutions and WormsRus:** <http://www.wormsrus.co.nz/>

**Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture:** [http://www.rnzih.org.nz/pages/Worm\\_farm.htm](http://www.rnzih.org.nz/pages/Worm_farm.htm)