

Getting Started with a Worm Bin

● You Will Need

A black plastic dustbin - Wickes £11.99
Gravel; 1-2 packs - Homebase £2.69 per pack
Drill
Drill Bit - 6mm

Cardboard, newspaper, egg boxes

Worms

Kitchen Waste

● Worm Bin

Take a black plastic dustbin with a lid and add 6 inches of gravel. If required; give the gravel a good rinse.

Drill holes (about 1/4" or 6mm) in a ring around the bottom 3 inches (8 cm) above the bottom. This allows any excess liquid to drain off. This can be collected and used as liquid fertilizer.

Drill another set of holes around the top and a few holes in the lid. This enables air to get into the bin BUT don't drill too many holes as this could cause the bin to get too wet, especially in heavy rain or when snow sitting on top thaws.

Now you are ready for some bedding material, worms, a newspaper cover and the bin lid. Note that worms don't like the light - so keep the lid on.

● Bedding Material

This is where your worms will live initially. Cardboard, newspaper and egg boxes are ideal - just rip them up and give them a soak to create a ph-neutral environment. Add about 4 inches of bedding.

Avoid bleached paper and coloured inks in newspapers as they tend to contain chemicals.

● Worms

In the UK they are known as 'Brandlings'. This is what to ask for in a fishing tackle shop. However, they are more likely to be called 'Tiger Worms' in pet shops where they are sold as pet food for lizards. Worth noting they are not the same as our earthworms.

Start with at least 300 worms otherwise they won't keep up with you. Better still go to ebay.co.uk where you can buy 500 for £11.50 plus shipping from Elgin.

Worm Food

Worms actually live off the microbes that break down the 'Worm Food'. Important to remember you are feeding micro-organisms so chop up the food quite small.

They will eat anything provided it was once alive and is now dead. The list will be long but most common would be kitchen scraps, fruit, vegetable peelings, tea bags etc. They will not eat anything fresh - a potato will simply grow!

Things to avoid are citrus fruit as they make the environment too acidic, meat is also not a good idea as it will smell and attract flies.

Egg shells are valuable as they will correct any rise in the acidity back towards neutral and also adds calcium to the finished compost. Best to collect a few egg shells together and put them in an oven for a few minutes to completely dry them out. Then grind them up and add to your worm bin.

Cover the top of the heap with a few sheets of dry newspaper. This acts rather like a dampness regulator and you'll find the worms like to shelter under it. It will get soggy and will get eaten - but easy to replace.

● **Maintenance**

All you need to do now is to keep feeding your worms and ensure they don't get too damp. If it does get soggy then add more bedding material. If you see the bin has lots of small thin white worms then it is too wet. If in doubt - add more bedding.

Eventually you should find you've filled the bin and the worms (or rather their offspring) are busy in the top layers of bedding/food. Now is the time to claim your compost.

Empty the top layers into a wheel barrow or onto a plastic sheet. You should find lots of worms and also their eggs which are yellow and about the size of a grain of rice. Keep going until all that is left is dark brown crumbly compost.

Dig the compost out into a plastic sack for use around the garden. You will find a few stray worms in this. You can pick them out or leave them as food for your birds. Stop as you get towards the gravel at the bottom and leave an inch or two as an initial bedding layer.

Now empty your wheelbarrow or plastic sheet back into the bin. Add a newspaper topping and carry on with the worm food. They really benefit from this 'turning' process and you'll find they will eat even more.

In the winter they will eat less so give less food. If you can put the bin out of extremes of the cold the worms will appreciate it. I've had mine all freeze to death and ended up a smelly mess which all got eaten up by the next generation who spent the winter as eggs - and the worms carried on just as before.

Good Luck with your own worm bin!