

APRIL 2022 HOTLINE FAQ:

What is Vermicomposting, and how can I do it? Where can I get supplies or Worm Castings?

Vermicompost is considered by many gardeners to be the ideal compost for use in our gardens as it is high in beneficial microbes and nutrients. “Vermi” is Latin for “worm” which is why some call it worm castings. Composting with worms is an effective way to process organic food waste into nutrient-rich soil. The red worm eats decomposing organic matter and produces nutrient rich soil as its output.



Vermicompost is dark in color, rich and dense, and earthy fragrant – like a good, loamy soil when moist. To provide an organic, balanced “fertilizer” or soil amendment, blend it into the top layer of raised garden beds, potted plants, and your landscape. While Vermicompost is slower to show effects in the plant, the nutrients, beneficial organisms, and humus that add “life” to the soil become available at a steady rate over a longer period.

The worm: *Eisenia foetida*, known as the red worm, red wriggler or manure worm, should not be confused with other worms, such as the “night crawler.” Night crawlers need large areas to burrow deep into the soil, while red worms live close to the surface, requiring little space to burrow. Therefore, they can create a thriving habitat in a very small area. Worm bins can be purchased commercially, or plastic storage bins can be used for a more affordable option. The bins are best kept inside, such as in a spare room or on a garage shelf and are excellent science tools for use in classrooms. Small fish bait shops carry red wigglers, and one container will be plenty of worms to start the habitat!

The red worm and the organisms that naturally work with it in the process of decomposition should be understood as their own micro-world. (Think “Horton Hears A Who!” by Dr. Seuss). Taking on vermicomposting is like having a pet. The worms are living organisms with life cycles and specific requirements for survival and success. This includes the bin, the bedding, temperature range, lighting (darkness is essential), collecting and delivering the right food, and the harvest. Once established, the worm bin can be very low maintenance, and an excellent way to keep organic waste out of the landfills.

CalRecycle, the agency in California for all things related to “Re-Think, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle,” has excellent resources to aid your efforts in vermicomposting.

<https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/Organics/Worms/>

Here you will also find “The Worm Guide, A Vermicomposting Guide for Teachers.” This is an excellent science-based guide for K-12 use, and the first 10 pages provide the best primer for anyone new to vermicomposting. The PDF format free download is at:

<https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/Publications/Details/912>

If you decide you want to use vermicompost, but you’re not ready to do it yourself, check out our regional non-profit for all things organic, Solana Center at <https://solana-center.square.site/>. Solana Center also carries supplies to get you started.



Three types of kitchen food scrap collection pails



Low-tech plastic storage worm bin and contents!