Friday’s Feature
By
Theresa Friday
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Worms can turn kitchen scraps into rich compost

Been thinking about composting, but you just don’t have the space? Well there is a system that uses worms to compost and the outcome is garden magic.

Vermicomposting is the process of using worms and micro-organisms to produce rich compost from kitchen wastes. One pound of worms can turn 65 pounds of garbage into garden compost in 110 days. It’s fun and it’s easy.

First you start with a worm bin. You can construct your own or purchase something to use as a bin. It’s convenient to buy a medium sized, plastic container with a lid. Drill 4 holes about 4 inches from the top of the bin. Cover the holes by taping small pieces of screen to the inside of the bin using duct tape.

Then you will need to make bedding for the worms. Start by shredding newspaper into 1 inch wide strips. Fill the bin to about 1/3 full. Then add approximately 1 cup of garden soil and 1 cup of sand. Moisten the mixture and stir.

Next you’ll want worms but not just any worm will do! Locate red wigglers or African nightcrawlers. These
worms are excellent composters and thrive in a worm bin environment. Red wigglers reproduce more quickly and are smaller than African nightcrawlers; both are good fish bait. Local worm farms or bait stores can usually provide these types of worms.

Your worms need a dark, cool place to work, so keep your bin out of the sun. The ideal temperature for worms is between 60 and 80 degrees F.

Feed your worms daily, weekly or as desired. One pound of worms can process ½ pound of kitchen scraps a day. The best diet for your worms are food scraps that are of plant origin. This includes vegetable and fruit trimmings, coffee grounds, tea bags and other paper products. Animal products such as meat, eggs, cheese, etc. are best avoided or kept to a minimum to prevent odors.

Cutting the scraps into small pieces allows the worms to consume them faster. Bury the scraps under the bedding. Rotate where you bury the food scraps. You may add more bedding every once in a while.

Check the moisture when adding kitchen scraps. If too wet, add more bedding; if too dry, add water. Worms like more moisture than you might think. Experiment with moisture levels.

After two or three months, the worms will have converted the bedding and food scraps into a rich, dark compost. Then it’s time to harvest your compost. This is probably the most difficult task since it’s not that easy to separate the worms from the compost. One way to harvest is to gently push the compost to one end of the bin and fill the empty side with moistened, shredded newspaper. Place kitchen scraps into bedding.
The worms will eventually leave the compost and migrate towards the food. The compost can then be removed. Another method is to harvest the worms and compost at the same time, dump the contents of the bin onto a piece of plastic. Allow the worms time to retreat to the middle of the pile away from the light, then scrape off the outer layer of compost. Repeat this procedure until all the compost is harvested and mostly worms are left.

When you’re done harvesting, share some of your worms with others, go fishing and/or return them to the bin filled with fresh, moistened bedding.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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