



Care for your Worms

Redworms (*Eisenia Fetida*) and European Nightcrawlers (*Eisenia Hortensis*)

Soil Moisture

Because of their delicate skin, redworms require a moist environment, about the same as your garden. The area in which you want them to live should be well-watered and even occasionally soaked, but should not be water-logged.

****NEVER USE WATER FROM A WATER SOFTENING SYSTEM - THE SALT WILL KILL THE WORMS.****

INDOOR COMPOSTING

Container

A variety of containers will do; be sure that you start your worms in no greater than 6 inches of bedding material and that there is ample room for drainage at the bottom. Also, please assure that oxygen is available (create holes as needed).

Bedding

To start your worm bin and any subsequent layer, we recommend a page or two newspaper and coconut coir thoroughly dampened with just a little bit of food scraps.

****If you have any type of melon rind, place it so that the juicy part is facing down. This is a favorite food for your worms and will help them adjust quickly to their new home!****

The starting bed should be at least 4 inches deep and should also include a handful of fine sand for the worm's digestion, and a handful of crushed eggshell for calcium and increased reproduction. If possible, add some worm castings which contain healthful bacteria to increase the rate of food decomposition. The bedding should be moistened to the "firm ball" stage. When squeezed, only a couple water droplets (not streams) will fall, and when released it will form a ball.

****Redworms and European Nightcrawlers are surface feeders and will only eat the top 3-5 inches of material in your bin. Be careful how much food you give your new friends - if you give them more than they can eat, the extra food might start heating up and composting - and your worms will definitely not like that!****

Spread your worms and the packaging material they came in over the moistened bedding. The worms should disappear into the bedding in 10-15 minutes. Both *Eisenia Fetida* and European Nightcrawlers have a tendency to try to crawl out when first put into a new bin or bed. You will need to either put a tight fitting vented lid on your bin or keep a light on over them to prevent them from escaping. The Redworms will usually settle down within a few days but the European Nightcrawlers will crawl at any time for no apparent reason.

To protect your investment and keep your European Nightcrawlers in your bin, always use a well fitted lid that allows adequate air flow or, alternatively, a constant source of light can be directed at the bin.

It is normal to have worms crawling up the sides and getting under the lid of a plastic bin, as they like the condensation that forms in these areas. You can entice your worms to burrow back into the bedding area by first tapping any worms off of lid or sides back onto top of bedding; then remove the lid and allow light to enter the bin. Let the worms burrow down on their own, do not bury them.

...see next page for Outdoor Release, Feeding, and Harvesting instructions



Care for your Worms

Redworms (*Eisenia Fetida*) and European Nightcrawlers (*Eisenia Hortensis*)

OUTDOOR RELEASE

When you receive your worms you may find them together in clumps. As soon as possible, these clumps should be gently broken up. Spread the worms over the surface of the soil and cover them loosely, without packing the soil.

Soil Condition

The well-being of your redworms will be directly related to the condition of the soil into which they are placed. Redworms will not survive for long in hard soils or in soils that have been treated with non-organic fertilizers.

Amount of Worms to Apply to Gardens

Each pound of redworms contains approximately 800-1200 worms. Given the conditions mentioned above (soil condition and moisture), the following application rates are appropriate: Lawns and gardens should have a minimum of 4 worms per square foot. Trees should have 20 worms for each square foot of drip line. Worm propagation areas should have 500 worms per square foot.

Feeding - Organic Matter

Organic matter provides worms with food and keeps the soil they live in loose and friable. Animal manure, leaves, grass clippings, compost or other decaying matter should be present to a depth of 6"-12". It is important that the organic matter not be "hot." For example: when introducing worms into a field that has been cover-cropped, wait a week or two after tilling in the cover crop.

OUTDOOR COMPOSTING WITH REDWORMS & NIGHTCRAWLERS

If possible, release the worms in the morning. This will give them time to settle into their new environment before dark and help to prevent them crawling away. Dig a shallow trench 2" x 6" wide around the pile; spread the worms (and the bedding they came with) into the trench, and cover loosely. The worms will eat their way into your compost pile, naturally seeking out the area of the pile that is the right temperature. During cold months, they will migrate into the center where the temperature is generally warmer, and in warm months they will migrate to the outer perimeter. Compost heaps 9 feet in circumference should have a minimum of 2,000-10,000 worms.

FEEDING

Feed only very lightly for the first week, then feed every other day beginning with ½ cup per pound of worms. The worms will consume any kind of biodegradable matter except materials containing excess oil or chemicals, and enjoy a varied diet. **SUGGESTED** - fruits & vegetable peelings and cores, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells, and any vegetable matter. **NO** - meat, bones, white flour, sugar, salt, vinegar, juice, preservatives, oils or dairy products. To encourage decomposition, you should chop the food before adding it to the bin. Place the food into a hole in a fresh section at each feeding, covering well with a solid layer of composting material.

HARVESTING REDWORM CASTINGS

Redworms produce soil-enriching castings full of live micro-organisms, plant growth hormones and micro-nutrients. This makes worm castings a valuable addition to gardens, fields, orchards, potted plants and compost piles. They may also be raised in a special worm composting bin and "transplanted" for use elsewhere. Your worm bin should be ready to harvest castings in about two to three months.

When it is nearly time to harvest, place a piece of window screen (cut to fit the bin, with holes big enough for the worms to pass through) over the worm bedding. Then place fresh bedding on top of the screen and begin feeding the worms on top of this second layer. The worms will squeeze up through the screen as the food above attracts them. After a few months, take hold of the screen edges and lift it out. Harvest the castings that are below the screen. Then move the newer composting material on top of the screen into the empty bin and replace the empty screen on top.