

# How to ... start a worm farm

The particularly nasty greenhouse gas methane oozes out of the organic rubbish that rots away underground at the tip. But we can cut it out by using a worm farm or compost bin at home.

Using a worm bin can repulse even the most hardy of us with images of writhing worms and rotting carcasses.

Rest assured, having a worm farm need not be like a horror movie. A worm farm is extremely easy to manage and will require only moderate attention, although you will need to concentrate a little bit in the early phases.

And the best part? You'll be saving loads of waste from going to landfill (around 40%), saving heaps of emissions from entering the atmosphere, creating juicy and delicious worm wee and poo for your veggie patch, and putting a little bit of love back into our environment.

And the kids can get involved. In fact, why not hand over worming responsibilities to the kids? Great idea, why didn't we think of that...?



## So, how to do it?

1. Make or buy a worm-friendly farm (contact your local Council, nursery or hardware store) and place it in a cool, well-drained area. If the box is in the summer sun the worms will cook. Bad news for the worms and bad news for you, as cooked worms smell even worse than what you think they will.
2. Line the bin with a few sheets of shredded newspaper and a couple of handfuls of soil. Spray lightly with fresh water. Too wet though and your worms will be swimming, try to keep it as moist as a wrung out sponge.
3. Add Tiger or Red Worms along with a small amount of food scraps. You can actually buy boxes of worms at hardware stores or some nurseries. Don't be worried if they disappear immediately into the soil and bedding - they don't like the light.
4. Add your food waste, being careful not to add too much. Overfeeding your worms will see you end up with rotting food that not even the worms will eat. And make things interesting for your worms by placing food scraps in different places in the bin - this will help distribute the food so you don't get clumps of uneaten food. Finely crushed eggshells are good news for your worm bin - they help to maintain a safe pH level in your worm bin. If they're not doing the trick sprinkle the soil with a little Lime (the powder, not the fruit) every couple of weeks. You'll know when the pH is off as your neighbours will be complaining about the pong.
5. Add a bit of water to the worm bin when and if it looks dry. Again, not too much or you'll drown your worms (stay with the moisture of a wrung out sponge). And be sure to keep your worm bin out of heavy rain. If you get caught out, drain the worm bin as soon as possible, keeping an eye out for swimming worms.

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org)

# How to ... start a worm farm

After a few month of feeding, your worm farm should be ready to harvest. How to do this?

**1.** Move the contents of the bin to one side. Add fresh bedding and food to the vacant side. The worms will move from the finished compost in search of food and to get out of the light. Leave it for a few days and then take out the older, worm free compost.

**2.** Alternatively you can tip the contents of the bin onto a large plastic sheet, and separate into small piles. Place a bright light above the sheet and the worms will move down away from the light allowing you to collect the worm-free compost from the top. Or you can do as we do and dig through the soil and separate your worms from your soil. It's a slow process but you'll get to know your worms by name.

**3.** Always leave a bit of the new compost in the bin — the bin starts decomposing food waste faster that way.

**4.** Once your worm farm is established your worms will produce worm castings (better known as poo). This is a beautiful and rich fertiliser that can be used on any indoor or outdoor plants including your lawns.



## What to add to your worm bin:

- Fruit and vegetables (except onion, leek and citrus – worms won't touch it)
- Pea pods
- Egg shells (crushed)
- Avocado seeds (cut into pits)
- Soaked and ripped pizza boxes
- Shredded and soaked cardboard
- Paper
- Dirt
- Hair
- Leaves

## What to keep out of your bin

- Plants from the onion family (garlic, shallots, leek)
- Citrus fruits
- Meat (can lead to bad smells and maggots)

**For more information on worm farming, please visit the following sites:**

Clean Up Australia - Worm Farming - <http://www.cleanup.org.au/au/LivingGreener/worm-farming.html>

Sustainable Gardening Australia - Worms: They Make Great Pets - <http://www.sgaonline.org.au/?p=6898>

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org)