WORM COMPOSTING (vermiculture)

Hold that trash and save your cash! Why add to the solid waste stream, increasing tax dollars spent on landfill fees when you can help the environment and your own plants? Kitchen waste such as fruits, vegetables, coffee grounds, tea bags, egg shells are an excellent source of organic matter which can be composted into a valuable soil amendment for house plants, flower and vegetable gardens. Composting with worms (vermiculture) is fun, easy and odorless if maintained properly. These amazing little creatures turn waste into compost before your eyes in as little as three months.

Materials: **1.** Worm bin – can be a plastic (solid color not transparent) or wooden box or tub at least 8 inches deep, (12"x17"x12" high plastic storage container works nicely) with vents on the sides and top for aeration. **2.** Bedding – shredded newspaper, shredded paper or cardboard or a combination, soaked in water and squeezed out before adding to the bin. **3.** One pound of red wiggler worms (Eisenia Fetida).

Possible sources for worms and supplies: **www.happydranch.com**; **www.wormwoman.com**

Setting up the Bin

1. Place the bedding in the container, mix and fluff thoroughly.
2. Add worms. Red wiggler worms (Eisenia fetida) are the best variety for composting. Healthy worms will crawl into the bedding away from the light. Allow the worms about an hour to settle into the bedding.
3. Bury a small amount of food waste (but never any animal or dairy products) in the worm bedding at one end. A two foot by two foot box eight inches high will use three to three and a half pounds of kitchen waste per week. The worms eat the bedding material along with the food scraps producing castings, a nutrient rich compost great for improving soil fertility and structure.
4. Cover with vented lid or loosely with plastic or newspaper. This helps to keep the system moist as does the moisture from the bedding and kitchen food scraps. Even so, the moisture content should be checked regularly and sprinkled with water if needed or add dry bedding to the bottom if to wet. DO NOT EXPOSE WORMS TO EXTREME HEAT OR ALLOW TO FREEZE. Optimum temperature is from 55-77 degrees.

After 3 – 4 months, the material on one end will turn dark brown and resemble soil. This product from the worm bin is vermicompost, a mixture of worm castings, decomposed wastes, and some uneaten bedding. This material can be spread out thinly on newspaper, relocating all worms to the bin. Once completely dried, sift to remove uncomposted material. The vermicompost can be used as a top dressing for house plants, as an ingredient in potting mixes or added to garden soil as a source of organic matter. The vermicompost was completely dried to prevent transfer of worms to the outside environment to which they are not native. As your worms multiply they can be divided and the whole process started over again. Share the extras with friends and neighbors and educate them at the same time.

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For more detailed information you may wish to obtain a copy of the book "Worms Eat My Garbage" by Mary Appelhof.