

Compost problems?

Symptom	Diagnosis	Treatment
Unpleasant odour	Too much food	Stop adding food.
	Not enough air	Gently stir contents (aerate).
	Too moist	Ensure proper drainage: check that the drainage holes are clear, or drill more holes.
Fruit flies	Too many acidic foods (citrus, coffee grounds)	Cut back on acidic foods. Add a little dolomite lime or ground eggshells.
	Food left exposed	Always bury food waste. Cover surface of the bedding with a burlap sack and use a fruit fly trap.
	Too much food	Don't overload the bin. If problem persists, move the bin to a location where the flies won't bother you.

Questions?

Call the Regional Compost Hotline at 604-736-2250.

Locate worm bins and workshops:

Call the Regional Compost Hotline for help on finding a worm bin and workshops. You can also build your own by purchasing a 38-litre plastic storage bin and drilling drainage holes at the bottom.

How to use your compost:

- **Fertilizer:**
Use your finished compost as a soil conditioner in plant containers and the garden.
- **Make potting soil:**
1/3 sifted compost
1/3 soil
1/3 vermiculite
- **Use the liquid**
Diluted (one part liquid with 10 parts water) as a plant fertilizer. You can call this *worm tea*.



5

Composting replicates nature's way of breaking down vegetation using worms, good bacteria, and other organisms.

Five great reasons to compost with worms

1. Reduce organic waste

From soil to food and back again. Reduce your ecological footprint by returning the nutrients in food scraps to your garden to nourish the soil—all in your own home.

2. Rejuvenate your house plants

Worms produce nutrient-rich compost that will keep your house plants healthy and strong throughout the seasons.

3. Boost your garden

Applying compost will improve soil health and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers to achieve a blooming garden.

4. Save time and money

You won't need to go out and buy plant fertilizer or compost with a closed loop composting system within your home.

5. Reduce use of chemical fertilizers

Keep local waterways clean by avoiding chemical fertilizers. Composting returns nutrients to the garden.

Ready to get gardening?

Visit www.growgreenguide.ca for practical solutions for healthy, sustainable gardens, including garden designs for balconies and patios.

Questions? Call the Regional Compost Hotline at 604-736-2250.

This publication is available online as a PDF. Search 'Worm Composting' or its partner brochure, 'Backyard Composting' at www.metrovancouver.org

metrovancouver

Together we make our region strong

metrovancouver | SOLID WASTE



Here's the Dirt Worm Composting

**It's easy to compost with worms—
we can show you how!**

Use worms to reduce your garbage.
Great for apartments, offices, and homes—
year-round indoors or out.

Composting with worms: 7 easy steps

1. **Fill** your empty worm bin with a variety of bedding and two handfuls of sand or soil. Ensure the container is at least half-full of bedding.
2. **Sprinkle water** on to the bedding so its overall moisture level is like a wrung-out sponge.
3. **Lift the bedding gently** to create air spaces. This helps control odours and allows the worms to move more freely.
4. **Add the worms.** Gently spread worms apart and cover with a thin layer of bedding material.
5. **Add food scraps** by pulling aside some of the bedding, dumping in the scraps, then covering the scraps with bedding.
6. **Bury** successive loads in different locations in the bin.
7. **Harvest your compost** in three to six months.

Harvesting your compost:

Worms work hard and fast. In three to six months, there will be little or no original bedding visible in the bin. The contents will be brown and earthy-looking. It is time to remove some of the finished compost.

The no-mess method

Push the bin contents over to one side and place new bedding in the space created. Place food scraps in the new bedding. Worms will gradually move to the new scraps, leaving the finished compost to be skimmed off as needed.

The some-mess method

If you want all of your finished compost at once, you must separate the worms manually. Most children love to help!

- Dump the bin contents onto a large plastic sheet under a bright light or in the sun.
- Make several small mounds on the sheet. The worms will hide at the bottom of each mound to escape the light.
- Scrape off the top of the mounds. Remove the worms and the tiny, lemon-shaped cocoons that contain baby worms.
- Mix a little of the finished compost in with the new bedding, and return the worms and cocoons to the bin.

You will need:

Worm bin container

Most commonly, people purchase a specially designed worm bin or use a standard 38-litre plastic storage bin. Other options include old trunks, barrels or build-your-own wooden bins.

- Bin should be relatively shallow and wide
- 20 to 30 cm deep



Air flow and drainage

Worms need air to breath.

- Drill eight to 12 holes about five centimetres apart in the bottom of the container; if contents become too wet, drill more holes
- Place a tray under the container to capture excess liquid
- Raise the bin on bricks or wooden blocks
- Cover the bin with a lid to conserve moisture and provide darkness for the worms
- Indoors, use a lid with drilled holes or place a breathable material on top of the bedding such as burlap sackings (plastic will create moisture and more fruit flies)
- Outdoors, use a solid lid to keep out unwanted scavengers and rain

Location

Keep your worm bin somewhere convenient for you to use; in the basement, shed, garage, kitchen or on your balcony.

Keep it out of the hot sun and heavy rain. When temperatures drop below 4°C, ensure your bin is insulated or move it indoors. When temperatures rise above 25 °C, ensure your bin is in a cool, shaded location or move it indoors.



Worms

The worms used in a composter are called **red wigglers** (also known as branding or manure worms).

Get worms from a friend's compost bin or purchase them. The Regional Compost Hotline at 604-736-2250 can help you find local sources of worms.



You might also be able to purchase a bin and worms from your municipality. Supplies are limited and they go quickly each year.



What to add to your worm bin:

Green material (acceptable)

✓	Kitchen scraps	Peels, stems, seeds, cores, and overripe produce.
✓	Plant trimmings from your garden	Leaves, old flowers, and end-of-season greenery.
✓	Coffee grounds and tea leaves	Separate grounds and leaves from filters and bags, as some are made of plastic — do not put these in your compost.
✓	Eggshells	Rinse and crush.
✓	Vegetables and fruit	Cut into thumb-sized pieces for faster composting. Note: no salad dressing.

Brown material (bedding material)

Use a mixture of bedding to provide more nutrients for the worms and to create a richer compost (worms like variety!). Add two handfuls of sand or soil to the bedding for grit. Because worms do not have teeth, they use the grit to grind their food.

✓	Leaves	Shredded fall leaves.
✓	Newsprint	Goes in the paper recycling but are safe in the compost if other brown material isn't available. Cut, shred or tear into smaller pieces for best results. Avoid international newsprint as inks may not be safe for compost.
✓	Cardboard	
✓	Brown paper bags	
✓	Grass clippings (dry)	
✓	Straw	Chopped.
✓	Finished compost	A great starter for your bin—full of healthy microorganisms that help with material breakdown.

Materials for your municipal green bin

✗	Small amounts of fats, oil, grease, and cooked food including rice or pasta	These materials are best suited for industrial composting processes and should be placed into your green bin.
✗	Fish, meat, bones	
✗	Dairy	

Well-tended worms make great compost.

Worms are living creatures with their own unique needs, so it is important to create and maintain a healthy habitat for them to do their work. If you supply the right ingredients and care, your worms will thrive and make compost for you.