

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 107

Vermicomposting

An Indoor Solution to Excess Pollution

What

Red worms are earthworms that can consume their own weight in organic waste every day. These amazing creatures enable indoor composting to work with virtually no smell.

Indoor composting is an excellent solution for recyclers who live in apartments or regions where no organic recycling service is provided by the municipality. While indoor composting does require regular maintenance, it takes less effort than caring for an outdoor compost pile. Red worms reduce organic waste to about a third of its original size.

With the amount of landfill space running out, vermicomposting is a positive contribution to a solution for pollution, especially for people who don't have a back yard.

How

To start, a few simple supplies are required: a bin, some bedding and about a pound of red worms per person living in the household. The bin should have a removable lid and holes punched in the top and bottom for air and drainage. A mat made for winter boots or a tray will be sufficient to collect any fluids that result in the breakdown of kitchen waste by the worms.

Bedding is required to make proper mulch when it is combined with kitchen scraps; it also shields the worms from light. Shredded black-and-white newspaper, cardboard, shredded autumn leaves, straw and peat moss can all be used as bedding and must be kept moist. This mixture should fill about three quarters of the bin. When the mulch is

properly moistened, kitchen waste can be added on one side of the bin below the bedding and the worms can be introduced on the other side.

Food should be placed in a new location each time as the worms will make their way towards the food as they need it. Red worms like to eat almost any organic kitchen waste. Any fruit or vegetable scraps, tea leaves and bags, coffee grounds and filters (paper) will be sufficient food for the red worms. To avoid strong odours and pests such as rodents and flies, meat and dairy products, grains and oily foods should not be added to the compost.

When

Organic scraps can be added every few days or once a week. The bedding will eventually break down. It should be changed approximately every three months to ensure that the worms have a balanced environment of oxygen and moisture.

To separate the worms from the compost and encourage them into the fresh bedding, simply push the composted material to one side of the bin and add scraps to the new bedding. They will make their way toward it and after a few weeks, the old compost can be removed. Worms cannot tolerate light, so shining a light on them will motivate them to move a little more quickly.

When given proper care, red worms can continuously clean up your scraps and leave you with sweet-smelling compost.

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