

# Vermicompost, or My Pet Worms

By Candace Dressler

I have had the same light teal coloured 45 litre Rubbermaid bin with my worm compost since 1993 or it might have been 1991. I remember the store I bought the 1lb of red wiggler worms at but I am not positive which house I was living in at the time. I was living in Edmonton and the worms even made the move to Ottawa with me in their Rubbermaid home.



Red wiggler worms have a vegan diet, but like people they like fat, for example they love avocados and watermelon (yes watermelon has fat). They will also quickly make any leafy vegetable scraps into compost. They are okay if the veggies are a bit moldy and already starting to break down in the compost pail before you feed them.

My compost is very low maintenance, we –usually my husband- empty the bin of about 2/3 of the compost 2 – 4 times a year. How much and how often depends mainly on how much we feed the worms, we are a family of two. When the bin is getting full we simply start putting the food on one side of the bin, wait a few days till they migrate to where the food is and remove the finished compost. The more you feed them the more they will eat and breed. The ratio of worms to scraps affects the speed that they consume what you put in the bin. We have shared worms with friends and neighbours several times over the years.

Our bin sits in a convenient spot to the kitchen: outside in the shade when the weather is above freezing, and it comes in the house for the winter. Sitting either on the floor by the back door or at the bottom of the basement stairs. They like to be warm (25°C), but not too warm. We have never had a fruit fly infestation. A couple of years ago when we had a house sitter there was one. To avoid this, you have to completely cover the food scraps with the finished compost or peat moss, and don't feed them too many

bananas. Bananas and other fruit often come with fruit fly eggs attached, so washing your fruit also helps. We have also never had a bad odour problem, again I think it is because we use enough bedding material and make sure the rotting food is always covered.



The worms like to have some crushed egg shells to use as grit to help them break down the food they are ingesting. They also need bedding material; we use peat moss and any shredded paper, cardboard and leaves. The worms do produce liquid so the bin has six 5mm holes drilled in the bottom that allow

the liquid to drain into a boot tray below the bin. I remove the liquid with a turkey baster and mix with water to feed my houseplants.

I have discovered that by feeding the worms pumpkin innards including seeds in the fall, I get good pumpkin seedlings in the spring. I have also had success germinating avocado seeds in the compost.

After 30 years my worm compost is just part of my kitchen and garden routine.