

FACT SHEET IN-GROUND WORM FARMING



Worms are nature's recyclers and their poo (castings) is great for gardens, making worm farming increasingly popular. By providing worms with an in-ground feeding station in your garden, you'll get many of the benefits of worm farming without the work of maintaining an enclosed free-standing system.



In-ground feeding stations allow naturally occurring garden worms to move in, feed, then move out again to disperse rich organic matter into the root zone of your plants. As they burrow, garden worms also create tunnels that loosen and aerate the soil, improving oxygen and water infiltration, which improves root growth and plant health.

HOW TO INSTALL

1. Select a spot in your garden (or raised veggie bed) that is easily accessible and close to plants that will benefit from rich nutrients and soil improvement.
2. Dig a hole a little larger in diameter than that of your feeding station and almost as deep as the height of the station.

Tip: Moist soil is easier to dig and is less likely to cave in, so wet the soil first if you can.

3. With the lid on, place your worm feeding station into the hole to check the depth – only the top 3-5cm of the station should remain above the surface.
4. With the lid still in place, backfill around the feeding station (using the previously removed soil) pressing gently down around the outside.
5. Over time the station will attract naturally occurring earthworms from the garden, but for the best results we recommend adding some composting worms, which will speed up the breakdown of organic material.

Did you know, composting worms don't like to live in soil, so they will stay inside the feeding station, supplying you with castings you can remove and use in other parts of the garden. They will also breed inside the station, so you'll have more worms to start new feeding stations in future!

6. Before placing compost worms into the feeding station, add some bedding material 5cm deep – castings, shredded cardboard soaked in water, wet newspaper and/or moist coir all work well.

Tip: If buying composting worms, ½ kg should be enough. Otherwise a handful of worms from a friend's worm farm will also do just fine.

7. Cover your newly added worms with a layer of wet newspaper, replace the lid and wet the soil around the feeding station to maintain the moist environment that worms require.
8. Leave the worms to settle in for a day or two before adding any food.
9. Then just start adding food scraps as they are produced – it will take time for your worms to multiply, so initial processing will be slow but will speed up over time.

HOW TO CREATE

If you aren't the DIY type, you may prefer to buy a ready-to-assemble feeding station.

If you prefer to make your own, here's how:

1. Find an old builder's bucket or plastic garbage bin with a firmly-fitting lid (any size container between 20L and 60L works well).
2. Cut off the base using a hand saw or jig-saw, so that the bottom is completely open.
3. Drill holes in the sides at various heights – these should be large enough for worms to move freely in and out (around 8mm in diameter is great).

OTHER THINGS YOU OUGHT TO KNOW:

Worms don't eat live material, only dead and decaying matter, so they won't harm your plants.

Worms promote the activity of beneficial micro-organisms in the soil and inactivate many of the bad microbes found in decomposing food.

Worms feed from the bottom of the scrap pile and work their way up – so you may not be able to see them unless you turn the pile over.

To speed up breakdown, you can gently turn the pile every couple of weeks using a small garden fork or compost aerator.

Worm castings will gradually build up in the feeding station. When space becomes limited, you can:

1. Stop feeding the station until all food scraps are processed, then remove the castings and use them elsewhere;
2. Take uneaten scraps off the top, remove castings from underneath, then replace the scraps; or
3. Install another feeding station in another part of the garden and move a handful of worms from your first station to start the new one.

For things you should and should not feed to your worms, and for trouble shooting problems like bad smells, see our Worm Farming Fact Sheet available at: www.denmark.wa.gov.au/environmental-events

PET POO DISPOSER

In-ground worm feeding stations are a great way to dispose of pet poo! They serve the dual purpose of keeping this stinky stuff out of your wheelie bin and providing nutrients directly to the roots of the plants in your garden. The castings produced go directly into the ground and that is where they stay. For health reasons, they should not be collected and applied to the soil surface as parasites in pet poo can survive to contaminate people, pets and edible plants.

HOW TO USE THE PET POO DISPOSER:

1. Make and set up as you would any regular worm feeding station.
2. Simply drop in pet poo whenever you clean up after your pets.
3. Every week or so add a couple of handfuls of damp shredded paper and a little water to keep the environment moist.
3. Before the bin is full, lift the worm feeding station out of the soil, leaving worm castings and uneaten poo behind.
4. Cover the site with soil and leave to finish breaking down for a few months before planting anything in that location.
5. Move the bin to another spot and start again.

Tip: Don't use the pet poo disposer for 2 weeks after treating your pets for intestinal worms as wormers can kill your composting worms too! Poo can be collected in another container over this time, then added to the pet poo disposer after the worming agents have broken down.

SEE OUR OTHER FACT SHEETS AND GREEN RESOURCES
AT www.denmark.wa.gov.au/environmental-events

