**Vermicomposting**

Gardeners know the benefits of composting and use outdoor compost bins to repurpose vegetable peels, egg shells, and other compostable food waste. Yet, as colder temperatures set in for the winter season, some people aren’t as willing to venture outdoors with banana peels, potato skins, or apple cores to add to their compost bins. It’s easier to veer from the sustainable path and just use the trash can. However, there is an alternative to trash receptacles, and that is vermicomposting!

Vermicomposting is the process by which worms convert organic materials into a high quality soil amendment. Red wiggler worms are suggested for indoor composting since they are very efficient at processing organic waste, are extremely prolific, and are willing to stay put in the darkness of their living quarters. Worms can be purchased from commercial sources or bait shops.

Bins manufactured specifically for vermicomposting are commercially available, but one can be created by drilling drainage holes into a plastic storage container then nesting this drilled container into another plastic container. Line the bin with damp newspaper then add shredded bedding material, such as newspaper or cardboard. Add a handful of worms. Cut compostable food scraps into small pieces and place in the bin. Cover the nested bins with a lid. Try not to overfeed since excess food may begin to mold within the bin before the worms can completely process it. Feed the worms approximately one cup of food twice per week. This amount may need to be adjusted due to the amount of worms in the system at a given time.

As the worms process the food waste, move the castings to one side of the bin and add fresh food and bedding materials to the opposite side of the bin. After the majority of the worms migrate to the fresh food side of the bin, harvest the compost from the other side. The vermicomposting system at our UW-Extension office has layers of multiple bins. Once the initial bin is full of compost, a second bin with fresh bedding and food is added on top of the initial bin. The lower initial bin of compost is emptied after the worms migrate to the upper bin. Our system allows up to 4 layers.

It is important to keep the bin’s inside environment warm, between 40 to 80 degrees F, and moist… not overly wet. The bins don’t require any special conditions for placement. Put in the basement, a closet, or a handy area near the kitchen.

If the interior of the bin gets too wet, add dry bedding material. The bin will have a bit of smell to it, somewhat similar to that of freshly tilled soil, but the odor should not be offensive. If it is, check for rotting food and remove it from the bin.

Use the compost created by the worms by incorporating it into the garden to improve the soil structure and add nutrients. It can also be used as a top dressing in containers or around the base of plants.

Worm your way out of taking out the trash by vermicomposting!

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