



ATO Worm Composting System Instructions

Introduction

Vermicomposting is a natural process of converting waste to soil. In this case kitchen waste is converted to rich soil (worm castings) utilizing a worm bin. The type of worms used in this process are red wigglers, they are a special species that do not live in soil but in compost heaps. They are extremely well-suited to this task and in ideal conditions will consume their own weight in food waste daily. They are also prolific breeders and should double their numbers every six months under ideal conditions.

Bedding & Feeding

The material that worms live in is called bedding and can be shredded leaves, peat moss, shredded cardboard or newspaper. The bedding will eventually assimilate into the feed or will become feed itself. When this happens new bedding must be added. Be sure that the new bedding is damp but not soaking wet. Several sheets of wet newspaper placed on top of the bedding serves to keep the contents of the bin from drying out and encourages the worms to breed and feed closer to the surface. Crushed limestone should be added periodically to keep acidic levels under control and as a food source for their primitive digestive systems. Always keep in mind that worms do not have an acidic digestive system like ours, they depend on micro-organisms and other insects to start the digestive process in the food waste so don't be alarmed by other insects in your system (most will be very minute).

Anything that was once alive can be a source of food except: oils, dairy products, meat scraps and citrus peels (except in large bins). The more you can chop or shred the waste the faster it will be consumed. Worms don't have teeth so large pieces of food waste may remain in the bin for months, especially hard vegetable stalks and potatoes. The smaller you can reduce the waste the faster the decomposition. Add a cup of sand or garden soil from time to time as this aids in the worms' digestive process. Feed only half the weight of worms in your bin, if you started with two pounds of worms then feed one pound daily and only if they are keeping up. Be very observant as this can be a serious problem. All feed must be buried or you may have a problem with flies. The bin should be odour free and the castings should smell like garden soil. If you overfeed you notice an odour, to correct the problem simply stop feeding until the worms have cleaned up the bin.

Harvesting the Castings

Every 4 to 6 months the castings can be harvested. Simply dump out the entire contents of the bin on tarp or plastic sheet. The top part of your bin will be worms, food and bedding and the bottom part will be worm castings. Simply move the top part to one side and start pulling the castings to one side; in other words, sift and sort. The worms don't like being exposed to light and will move to the centre of the pile. You can use the castings as a top dressing in your garden or on your houseplants. It is very rich, much more than regular compost, and is completely neutral.

Compost Tea

On one bottom corner of your bin you will find a vent or drain hole. This enables you to tilt the bin to one side and drain off the compost "tea" which is another useful by-product of this process. The tea is an excellent plant food, simply dilute 50/50 with water and use weekly - your plants will love it!!

Happy Composting!!