



# CARE INFO

## Red Worms



### About Red Worms

Red worms (*Eisenia foetida*) are great at breaking down organic matter and turning it into compost that's good for the earth. Worms do not have eyes, ears, noses or any bones. Their bodies are made up of many rings with grooves between them, called segments. By expanding and contracting the muscles in their body, worms are able to move. Their tiny bristles, called setae, also help them to move. Worms do not have lungs or breathe as we do. Instead, they respire along the entire surface of their bodies. In order to respire, worms must have moist skin. Red worms prefer to stay in dark places and will move away from any direct light source. Even without eyes, they are very sensitive to light. You may see a few tiny, lemon-shaped cocoons in your cup of worms or, later, in your worm bin. Each of these cocoons is a casing from which 2-5 baby worms will emerge!

### Red Worm Care

- Worms prefer to be at room temperature. Your worms will thrive if you keep them in a place with temperatures from 60° to 80° F.
- Worms require a moist environment. Keep a spray bottle or small cup nearby to add water to your bin when necessary. The contents of your worm bin should feel like a damp sponge—moist but not dripping wet. If there is water standing in the bottom of your container, your worms could drown. Pour out excess water or mop it up with a paper towel.
- Remember, worms like to be in the dark! Keep their home covered by a blanket, towel or lid.

### Setting Up Your Worm Bin

Creating a worm composting bin is easy! You can use almost any kind of container—wood, plastic or metal. The container should be 18-24 inches deep. For each cup of worms, you will need a square foot of surface area. If you are able, use a bin that is bigger than the minimum requirements. The extra space will allow you to more easily observe and care for your worms. It also gives them plenty of room to grow and multiply!

### Setting Up Your Worm Bin

Once you've selected your container, drill or poke several dozen holes in its sides and top. Your worms need plenty of fresh air to remain healthy. Good air circulation is also the key to an odor-free composting bin.

Before placing your worms in their new home, spread 3-4 inches of moistened bedding in the bottom of your bin. You can make bedding out of shredded newspaper, machine-shredded paper (no colored or glossy paper), cut-up or torn cardboard and a few handfuls of dirt, peat moss and/or sand. Place your worms on top of this first layer of bedding, then cover with another 1-2 inches. Place your worm bin where it is protected from extreme temperatures and bright light.

Over time, your worms will convert any organic matter you give them into castings (worm manure). The castings, combined with well-decomposed bedding, are referred to as vermicompost—compost made by worms! After about 3-4 months, it will be time to clean out your bin. Simply remove 2/3 of the vermicompost and place directly in a garden, flower bed or landscaped area of your school. Spread the remaining 1/3 of the bedding along the bottom of the bin. Add fresh bedding. Your worms will get right back to work.

### Feeding Your Worms

Worms will eat just about anything. Food scraps such as leftover fruit, vegetables, grains and coffee grounds are perfect. You can also give them leaves, grass and other green matter from around your home and school. DO NOT give them any meat, dairy or non-biodegradable items (like plastic, metal or glass). It is also best to avoid banana peels, as they attract fruit flies. Each worm will eat about half its weight in garbage a day. But don't just drop your garbage on top of the bedding. Deliver food for worms directly to them at the moist, dark level where they live. Dig a hole down into the bedding, drop items in and then cover over again.