

Thinking Outside the Recycling Bin: Composting with Worms

Now that you're recycling as much as you can and buying fewer non-recyclable materials and packaging, take a look in your trash bin. What's left? Chances are what's in there is mostly biodegradable materials, like food and even paper products. Looking for an alternative for these biodegradable leftovers? Feed them to worms!

Vermicomposting, or composting with red wiggler worms, is a great composting solution for those who cannot compost outdoors, such as apartment dwellers, or for those who want to encourage a speedier composting process. The worm bin will require a little bit of work at the beginning to get set up and you'll need a bit of ongoing maintenance to ensure a proper worm habitat. The results: your pet worms will turn your organic kitchen matter and paper waste (napkins and paper towels) into vermicompost; also referred to as worm castings, or "black gold," considered to be the highest quality food-based compost.

Compost can be mixed in with soil to nourish your backyard trees, shrubs and garden. Your potted houseplants will love your nutrient-rich compost, you can stop spending money on fertilizers and even water your plants less! If you have kids around, you get extra bonuses: the worm bin is a great learning tool *and* an amusement park in a box! I personally enjoyed the company of my pet worms at work so much that I extended the worm family to my home. It is amazing how little is left to go out to the curb these days!

Keeping biodegradable materials out of the garbage can is important, not just to prevent waste, but also because organics such as food scraps, yard waste and even paper products actually contribute to global warming when buried in a landfill. Organic materials in a landfill don't decompose as they would in the compost bin. In the landfill, they are densely packed and covered, giving them no access to the elements (especially air) to break down organically. These materials will eventually decompose, but it happens anaerobically (without oxygen). This process releases methane, a greenhouse gas that, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, is 23 times more effective at trapping radiant heat than carbon dioxide. In comparison, in a well functioning compost bin, organic materials break down aerobically (with oxygen), and rather than becoming a significant contributor to global warming, they create compost, a valuable soil enhancer for our clay-based Colorado soil.

Need to see a worm bin in action? Interested in learning more about vermicomposting? Eco-Cycle will be presenting a free **Vermicomposting 101** workshop on Wednesday, June 13th from 6:00-7:30 p.m. at the Eco-Cycle/Broomfield Recycling Center's education room at 225 Commerce St. We'll teach you how easy it is to maintain your worm bin, what you should and should not feed your worm friends and where you can purchase the little red wigglers. For \$5 we'll even help you build a worm bin for you to take home to get started. Please RSVP by calling 303-404-2839 to ensure we have enough materials.

If you're not quite ready to become a worm farmer, there are several other food composting options that can be found online, at the hardware store and that you can even build yourself. For general outdoor composting basics, visit our website www.ecocycle.org and click on the compost link.

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