

Wally's Weekly News 10th JANUARY 2009  
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## WORM FARMING

Having your own worm farm is a great way to recycle kitchen scraps turning them into liquid plant food and worm casts (vermicasts) which can be incorporated into your gardens or containers.

Worms are the most efficient method of recycling household wastes into high value nutrients for the garden.

There are about 3000 types of worm species but of these, there are only about a half dozen or so that are important to cultivation.

*Eisenia foetida*, commonly known as the Manure Worm, Red Wiggler or Tiger worm, has alternative bands of yellow and maroon down the length of its body.

You know you have one when you pick it up, it thrashes about, wriggling and squirming. The amazing attributes of the Tiger worm include, being able to consume their own body weight in food each day.

The daily food intake of organic material results in a wonderful, organic material called vermi-cast.

They also produce 60% of their body weight in urine each day which is referred to as leachate.

This leachate is very high in nitrogen and can be diluted 1:10 parts water for use as a highly nutritious plant food.

Tiger worms are surface feeders and they thrive in organic materials such as manure and kitchen scraps when these materials are mulched on top of the soil.

Tiger worms have another interesting aspect as they are a little like Monarch Butterfly's caterpillars in so much as they are distasteful to predators such as birds.

Thus many birds will leave them alone and being surface eaters this is most important as they are easy prey otherwise.

These wonderful worms are the best compositors in the world, turning waste material into high value nutrients for plants to use.

Everyday you likely throw out kitchen wastes, which clog up our tips and sewer systems. Such a waste of wastes.

Now what say you could convert your wastes to top quality plant food (leachate) plus highly nutritious soil for gardens and containers (vermicast) and be able to collect these valuable products cleanly and simply?

Well now you can with a worm farm such as a unit called 'Worm-a-Round'.

The Worm-a Round is a special double bin that allows you to run your own Vermicomposting unit and collect the valuable plant nutrients.

Simple to use, you start off with newspaper and kitchen wastes to which is added 250 grams of Tiger Worms. (These are available from worm farmers through out NZ)

Each day you simply add your kitchen wastes for that day and once in full operation your Worm-A-Round bin can cope with 2 kg of kitchen waste per day.

A tap is on the lower, collector bin and each week you can collect about a litre of leachate. This can be stored for use as required.

If you think about it, that's about \$20.00 worth of top quality plant food a week.

Over the following weeks and months the worm population will increase till it reaches its

optimum level. (Worms are self regulating in this aspect)

At this time you could remove some of the worms and place them in the garden under a layer of organic mulch. Mushroom compost would be ideal for this along with newspaper and kitchen scraps..

You may like to add them to your own compost heap to get more action from it. If you don't remove any worms it does not matter as they will not over crowd their home.

It takes between 3 to 6 months to reach this point.

After a period of time vermicast will reach the top of the first tray and then the second tray should be added to the bin. Food scraps can then be placed in this top tray, daily.

Once this top tray is three quarters full of vermicast most of the worms will have moved up into it.

At this time you can remove the bottom tray (full of vericast) for use with your potting mixes, as seed raising mix, mulch around plants, or for use under plants at planting time. It also can be added to non chlorinated water as an additional liquid additive in the garden.

Vericast, like ordinary worm casts is a beautiful crumbly material just bursting with plant nutrients.

Each harvest will save you many dollars in potting mixes and other plant foods.

Except for your initial outlay for the bin, instructions and worms the whole process will not cost you a penny in the future but will return you many dollars worth of products every week for years.

Vermicomposting is an interesting aspect of gardening and of great value to your plants as well as the important principals of recycling.

An activity that even the younger members of the family can enjoy and participate in.

Giving them a better concept of nature and the world around them.

I currently throw my kitchen wastes into my plastic composter but have found that it encouraged rats and mice over winter.

(Mind you they do a fine job digging through the compost and aerating it)

The Worm-a-Round is rat and mice proof so you won't have that problem.

Worm-a-Rounds are available through some retail outlets, worm farmers or by mail order.

See [www.gardenews.co.nz/worms.htm](http://www.gardenews.co.nz/worms.htm)

Vermicomposting is very popular overseas and is highly valued by persons conscious of the need to recycle as well as gardeners both organically minded and otherwise.

Instead of taking out the kitchen scraps every day I have a plastic lidded box where the scraps are stored till full and then placed into either of my two Worm-a-Rounds.

A sound investment for the New Year.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)