

Wiggly  
Wigglers

**THE COMPLETE  
WIGGLY GUIDE  
TO YOUR URBALIVE  
WORM COMPOSTER**

**--- GETTING STARTED & TROUBLESHOOTING ---**



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## WIGGLY WIGGLERS URBALIVE

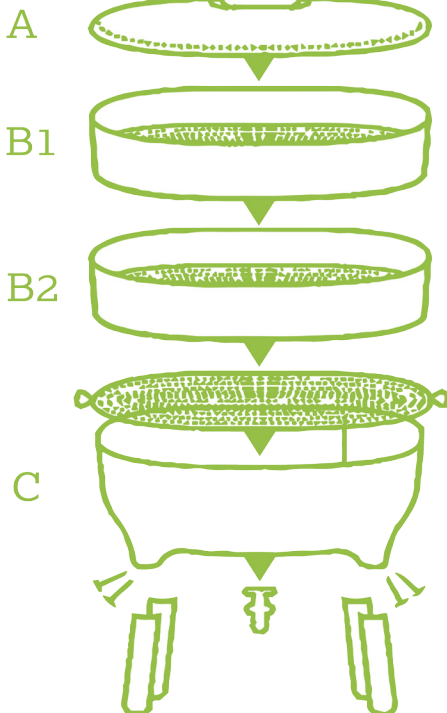
is a worm-assisted composting system which converts food waste from your kitchen and garden into a rich, dark growing medium and liquid feed. It is simple to operate (the worms do all the hard work!) and, if properly maintained, will repay your investment many times over.

Besides helping yourself you will, of course, also be helping the environment by reducing the volume of food waste being added to the nation's landfill rubbish tips. Food waste in such tips is simply left to rot away: releasing methane, one of the 'greenhouse' gases, into the atmosphere as it does so.

## YOUR URBALIVE KIT CONTAINS

- 1 Lid (PART A)
- 2 Working Trays (PART B1 & B2)
- 1 Collector Tray/Sump (PART C)
- 1 Plastic Tap, 4 Legs (and screws)
- A Moisture Mat, 500g Worms
- 1 Bedding Block,
- 2kg Worm Treat
- 2kg Lime Mix

PLUS Gloves, a handy scoop and this guide!



## ASSEMBLING YOUR URBALIVE

Fix the four legs to the collector tray (PART C) using the screws provided - make sure they are firmly in place.

Screw the tap into the collector tray (PART C)

Attach the grate onto the top of the collector tray (PART C)

Slot PART B2, B1 and the lid (PART A) into place.



# COMPOSTING WORMS

Our composting worms are a mixture of species (mainly reds and dendras) selected for their composting ability. Composting worms are native to the UK and in the wild can be found on the surface of the ground, generally in leaf litter. They are not the same as earthworms, which are deep burrowing creatures and not suitable for composting systems. Composting worms will eat all manner of household waste from fruit and vegetable peelings, cardboard, paper, bread, pasta right through to the contents of your vacuum cleaner.

## EXTRA BITS AND BOBS!

Worm Composting isn't a full time job, generally once the Composter has been established and the worms are comfortable you won't need to do much, just keep feeding them. Here are a couple more things you'll need.

### WORM TREAT

Worm Treat is our natural accelerator for any worm-assisted composting system. It is a special mixture of all the things that worms love best. Mix a handful into your composter every few weeks to give it a boost. The pellets also soak up any excess moisture in your composter and swell up in volume. Worm Treat helps keep your system in peak form!

### ANTI ACID LIME MIX

Add a handful of our Lime Mix neutraliser to your wormery every couple weeks to prevent acid build up. Lime Mix also helps prevent smells, flies and white worms. Because it contains grit it also aids the worm's digestion, and its drying properties make it good for wet or under-performing kits. Good composting conditions are achieved when the contents are close to pH7.

### MOISTURE MATS

Worms work best in dark, moist conditions. Our breathable Moisture Mats provide these conditions where they are most needed, on the surface of your composter.



They encourage the worms to work in the freshest waste, thereby speeding up composting and reducing odours.

Moisture Mats disintegrate over time so these will need replacing every few weeks. Our Moisture Mats for the Urbalive are made from 600g/sq.m hemp fibre matting.

# THE TOP TEN TIPS FOR GREAT WORM COMPOSTING

The following tips represent the result of a great deal of experience in worm-assisted composting. Please read them carefully and try to follow their advice. If you follow them properly you will have a contented stock of worms which, in due course, will produce for you a steady stream of rich dark compost.

- 1** Don't try to rush things: it will take several months for the worms to produce their first Tray full of compost. Initially, when adding waste, do not add large amounts at one time, little bits of food at frequent intervals is the best recipe. However, worms can eat half their own weight in food every day so, as the kit becomes established and the worms start breeding, add more waste each day. Do not pile up fresh waste to a depth greater than 50–100mm (2–4") at any one time. You can add waste as long as you can see worms working in the top layer of waste, just under the surface - within a few centimetres of the moisture mat.
- 2** At least 25% of what you add to the wormery needs to be dry material. Cardboard, egg boxes and shredded paper are great - these will help keep the wormery aerated.
- 3** If your worms get behind in their feeding and uneaten waste begins to build up in the bin, stop feeding for a few days. (Remember, though, worms do not have teeth and therefore the waste must start to go slightly mouldy before the worms can eat it.) Start feeding again when the worms are working in the top layer. Large quantities of uncomposted waste will start to putrefy. Putrefied waste will upset the worms and its smell will upset you, but not the rats and flies it will attract!
- 4** Try many different foods. Just like us, worms enjoy variation in their meals. If certain types of food prove unpopular and don't get eaten, try to avoid including them in future feedings. Once every few weeks add in a handful of Wiggly Wigglers Worm Treat (a special mixture of all the things that worms love best), it will give your composting a boost.
- 5** Grass clippings and leaves cannot be composted in your kit. Grass will heat up in the bin and release ammonia before the worms can act on it, both conditions will harm your worms.
- 6** Worms are not happy in conditions that are acidic (pH less than 6). If you have a pH meter check the contents regularly, pH7 is ideal, pH6 to 8 is acceptable. To prevent acidity avoid adding any very acidic wastes such as citric fruits or onions. Sprinkle a handful of Wiggly Wigglers Lime Mix onto the surface of the waste every couple of weeks, this will counteract the natural acidity of much kitchen waste.
- 7** Worms like dark moist conditions so keeping a moisture mat on top of the freshest waste will ensure that your worm composter doesn't start to dry out. Don't allow the contents to become waterlogged (see Tip 9) as this will lead to a lack of air in the bin. The contents of your Urbalive should be as moist as a freshly wrung sponge.
- 8** It will take a couple of months for the liquid feed to build up but then you should drain the sump in the Collector Tray frequently, depending on how much liquid you are getting, by opening the Tap. The liquid that you drain off makes an excellent houseplant and tomato feed. Dilute it with ten parts water before use.
- 9** If too much water gets into your kit and the contents become waterlogged you will need to drain off the excess liquid from the sump. Then try to dry out the contents by mixing in some shredded newspaper or cardboard (glossy magazine style paper is bad, toilet roll centres are good). As you mix in the paper try to 'fluff up' the contents to aerate the system. If your kit is producing a lot of liquid fertiliser, or rain water gets into the kit, it can be a good idea to leave the tap open with a container underneath. (Rainwater may occasionally get in as the lid is not airtight).
- 10** Avoid all oral contact with the bin's contents and remember to wash your hands afterwards.

# STARTING WORM COMPOSTING WITH URBALIVE

**PLEASE NOTE: IF YOUR KIT CONTAINS LIVE WORMS YOU WILL NEED TO GET IT SET UP WITHIN 24 HOURS.** Choose a site for your Wiggly Urbalive that is sheltered, preferably in a shed, utility room or greenhouse.

## THE COLLECTOR TRAY (C)

This tray acts as a sump. Excess liquid drains into it from the working trays above. Do not put any worms, compost or scraps in here! The cover in the collector tray allows any worms that fall into this tray to climb back up.

## THE BOTTOM WORKING TRAY (B2)

Half fill a bucket with warm water. Put your Bedding Block into the water.

As the block soaks-up the water, begin to break it up into an even mix. It should take an hour or so. Squeeze out any excess moisture when finished.

Evenly distribute half of the soaked bedding into this tray - a couple of inches is plenty. The left over soaked coir is a great potting base.

Empty your bag of worms onto the bedding. Worms are light sensitive, so leave the lid off for a couple of hours to encourage them to burrow down into the bedding.

Once the worms have burrowed into the bedding you're ready to add your first waste. Spread it evenly on top of the bedding: a few handfuls is all you need this first time. Cover the waste with your Moisture Mat. This will be munched by your worms over time so be sure to order a few spares.



Slowly, over the next few weeks, add more waste (small amounts at a time) until the tray is full. The key to worm composting is that you don't need to wait until the worms have eaten all the previous waste: as long as they are working just below the surface they're ready for you to add a little more.

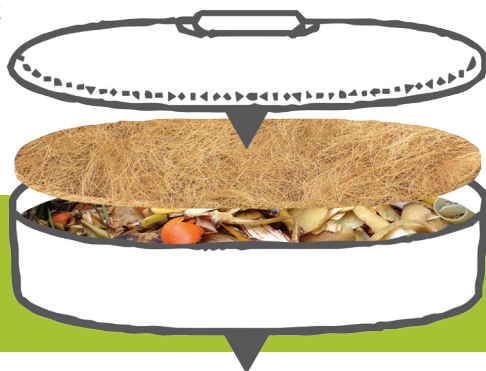
### THE TOP WORKING TRAY (B1)

Place the Top Working Tray on top of the first Working Tray only when you are sure its base will touch the material beneath. Always place your Moisture Mat (and Lid) on top of the freshest waste. Ensure that the waste level touches the base of the new Tray before fitting it—as the worms continuously reduce the volume of the waste this level sinks all the time! Now you can continue to add waste to the new Tray. Before adding any more waste ensure that the worms are working just below the surface of the existing waste.

### THE MOISTURE MAT

## PART B1

### THE TOP WORKING TRAY



## PART B2

### THE BOTTOM WORKING TRAY



## PART C

### THE SUMP/ COLLECTOR TRAY





# HARVESTING YOUR COMPOST

Gradually add waste until the top tray is completely full. This will take longer than you think because every time you add waste and the worms process it - it drastically reduces in volume. At this stage most of the worms will be in the Top Tray - the Bottom Tray will contain fully worked waste, ie worm casts. Now is the time to take out the Bottom Working Tray and harvest the rich casts. Once you have emptied this Bottom Working Tray it goes back on the top of the pile becoming the new Top Working Tray and you start adding scraps here to begin the process all over again.

Note: When starting the a new Working Tray you don't need to add further bedding as you did when first setting up the kit. The worms will make their own bedding as they progress up through the system.

It may take over 6 months for your system to become ready to harvest its first compost. Thereafter you should be able to harvest new bottom trays full of compost on a regular basis. Important: Add a handful of Lime Mix and Worm Treat every couple of weeks with your kitchen scraps.

Worm Tea: You will produce an on-going supply of worm tea which is really rich in nutrients. Dilute 1 part worm tea to 10 parts water and use on houseplants and throughout your garden.





## USING YOUR COMPOST

The compost is very rich in nutrients and organic matter and can be used as an excellent medium to grow plants in. It is rich in soluble plant foods and its fine crumbly texture will greatly improve soil structure. It is not necessary to sterilise the compost before using it in the garden, its bacterial content comprises beneficial species which will not harm your plants. It can be used in all the situations where compost is normally used, for example when planting seeds or shrubs; or as a top dressing for fast growing plants.

### AS A FERTILISER

Worm Compost is much more than just a simple fertiliser, it can be used to keep favourite specimen plants in peak condition. Used around the plant's base it will both feed the plant and help retain moisture for the roots. When planting out seedlings, beans etc sprinkle a little along the bottom of the trench to give them the best start in life.

### AS AN ORGANIC SOIL IMPROVER

Most soils can benefit from an increase in organic matter and natural fertiliser. To produce your own soil improver mix 5 litres of Worm Compost with the contents of a 50 litre bag of finely ground bark. Dig into the area of garden to be treated, applying 2 litres per square metre. For an acidic garden bed (such as those containing Rhododendron species) a low pH material should be used instead of the ground bark.

### AS A TOP DRESSING

House plants in pots eventually use up the supply of fertilisers in their soil. Top dressing with Worm Compost is the ideal way to replenish the nutrient levels. Scoop out the top 12mm of compost from the pot and replace with fresh Worm Compost, then gently mix this in. The foodstuffs in the Worm Compost will be carried down to the roots by watering.

### AS A COMPOST

Worm Compost is an ideal base for mixing fine composts. The mix of products in your own compost 'recipe' is, up to you, but the following proportions will give good results:

- For potting:  
25% Organic Compost, 25% Coir,  
25% Perlite, 25% Sand
- For seeds:  
25% Organic Compost, 25% Perlite, 50% Coir  
(Ground Bark or Coco Peat are suitable alternatives to standard Moss Peat.)



# WHY ARE MY WORMS DETERMINED TO ESCAPE?

## WHEN YOU FIRST SET UP THE KIT...

Your worm bin is not designed to house your worms so that they cannot escape – in fact worms can get through virtually any crack... The point is to make your wormery as attractive to the worms as possible so that they stay put. If you think of worms in a wooden composter or a compost heap these don't need to imprison the worms – the worms stay if conditions are favourable and so that's what we aim to provide.

When you first set up your worm composting kit and add your worms – it's a bit like taking the cat to a new house... There is a tendency to explore and head for the exit... Once they are settled into their new home and established their burrows they are less likely to run for home but here are a few ways you can help minimise the losses.

Set up your worms in the morning and once you have put the bedding into your kit and the worms in with it add some kitchen waste and leave the lid off all day. Worms go away from the light so this helps to ensure they start to get established. If the kit is outside accept a few losses and repeat the next day and gradually you will find your worms will settle down. If you are keeping them in a shed then leaving the light on and the lid off will also help.

## ONCE YOU HAVE HAD YOUR WORMS FOR A WHILE...

The first thing to do work out if this is a mass exodus or just a few worms. If it's just a few worms around the outside of the bin don't worry – this is part of the natural process. There are always some worms that like to go walkabout (like humans really). However, if they are all trying to leave look for the problem...Here are a few things to look for:

**1: IS YOUR BIN TOO WET?** If there is liquid puddling at the bottom of the bin, and the bedding material drips liquid when you squeeze a handful of it the wormery is too wet. Add lots of dry waste – newspaper worm treat and lime mix will help as well and avoid waste with very high water content for the next few waste additions (melon, squash etc)

**2: HAVE YOU ADDED SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO THE BIN?** If your worm composter was composting well and then all of a sudden the worms are trying to get out look at what you've added. Sometimes particularly if you've added a lot of citrus fruit this can irritate the worms due to the acid content. Remove the excess and add a good handful of lime mix and things should recover.

Worms are natural composters and they don't need to be in a completely worm tight bin to work (often they occur in a compost heap which has no sides) So by paying attention to what you add to your bin, and adjusting the moisture levels, you should be able to keep your worms happy and inside the bin, where they belong.

# TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

## COULD MY WORMS DIE?

Yes: Occasionally this can happen. It may be because of excess moisture in the wormery. Excess moisture by itself shouldn't hurt earthworms, but the problem may be lack of oxygen related to high moisture levels. It may be because of decaying food. Mouldy bio-waste in itself also shouldn't kill earthworms. But should you find mouldy food leftovers in the wormery, remove them. It may possibly be that the worms are starving. Earthworms may starve and die after only several weeks without a food supply. If you managed to compost your worms, don't panic. Try again with a new hatch of earthworms!

## I'M FINDING WORMS IN THE COLLECTOR TRAY OR OUTSIDE THE COMPOSTER. WHAT'S WRONG?

The earthworms shouldn't be crawling into the collecting container on their own, just as they shouldn't be outside the wormery. If they do, it means they don't like something inside the container. It could be excess food, so take some away. It could be the lack of air. Check that the moisture level in your wormery isn't too high.

## HOW DO I HANDLE FRUIT FLIES?

Fruit flies (together with other organisms) are a part of vermicomposting to a lesser or greater extent. We can avoid reproduction of fruit flies in your wormery by covering the surface of the compost with your Moisture Mat. You can cover the newly added food a little or possibly cover the surface with already processed compost.

You can also create one of the recommended traps. For example, you can put a piece of banana at the bottom of a jar, create a paper cone with a tiny opening and place it point down into the glass, sealing around the edges. Or mix 3 tablespoons of water, 1 tablespoon of vinegar, 4 drops of dishwashing liquid and a pinch of baking yeast and place a container with this mix near your wormery.

If the flies do hatch, they don't get out and that can be a success. Unfortunately, you may repeatedly introduce the flies into the composter with fruit and vegetable peels containing fruit fly eggs.

## WHAT TO DO IF MY WORMERY HAS AN ODOUR?

Properly maintained compost doesn't have an unpleasant odour. Should odours appear, it's most often because the earthworms can't manage to process all the bio waste, so lower the amount. The unprocessed bio-waste also causes high level of moisture of the composted material that then decays and smells. You can dry the contents of the composter with pieces of shredded paper, newspapers, cardboard or egg crates. The cause of the odour can also be remnants of stalk vegetables or potatoes. These should be introduced to the composter only after several months, when the earthworms are sufficiently active for timely processing.

## WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE IS MOULD IN THE COMPOST?

If the contents of the wormery decay or mould appears, it means that the worms can't manage to process the waste fast enough. Remove rotten or mouldy pieces from your wormery, reduce the volume of kitchen waste you put into the composter and only once you see that the worms manage to process the food you give them, begin gradually increasing the volume of waste.

## HOW DO I DECREASE THE MOISTURE LEVEL IN THE WORMERY?

Higher moisture is good for the production of worm tea, but an excess of anything is damaging. You can reduce moisture by adding materials that bind moisture, such as paper towels, newspaper, egg crates and similar dry material.

# COMMON FAQ'S

## WHICH WORMS ARE USED FOR COMPOSTING?

Our composting worms are a mixture of species (mainly reds and dendras) selected for their composting ability. Available with or without bedding. These types of worms are productive at consuming organic leftovers. Common garden earthworms don't perform as well in the same conditions.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO COMPOST ONE FULL CONTAINER?

Creating quality composts takes approximately 2-3 months. It mainly depends on the number of earthworms and the quality of "food".

## IS THE COMPOSTING METHOD DIFFERENT AT THE BEGINNING FROM LATER ON?

Yes, and it's very important to remember this. Give your worms enough time to settle and reproduce, don't swamp them with food from the get go. You will know that the earthworms are well adjusted when they begin to process the food you give them more quickly and you will also be able to feed them more often.

## SHOULD I RAKE THROUGH THE COMPOST REGULARLY?

Not at all. The nosy among you beware and also make your children understand this - it's not useful to disturb the compost, particularly during the initial breeding. Add the food to the top. This prevents you from disturbing the worms and disrupting their homes - they only lay eggs in specific places. You can carefully rake the compost if it appears too wet or lacking air.

## CAN I LEAVE FOR A LONGER HOLIDAY?

A holiday is no problem. The worms easily manage even a two-week fasting. However they can survive without food upto four weeks.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE A TRAY FULL?

Once you fill one tray and it looks like worms soon will not have anything to eat, load the next tray as well as at the start composting. Compost from the bottom of the tray can then be used as fertilizer or dry it for later.

## HOW CAN I DILUTE AND USE WORM TEA?

Worm tea is an excellent liquid fertilizer for herbs and indoor plants as well as the garden. It contains high amounts of nutrients and enzymes that promote growth and help build plant resistance against pests. You can collect worm tea in a plastic or glass bottle. It's ideal to dilute it with 10 parts water. Use the diluted worm tea for watering plants or spray it on their foliage.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH EXCESS COMPOST OR WORM TEA?

Anyone who grows plants will appreciate compost and worm tea. If you can't find anyone who could use it for gardening, use the compost to fertilize trees, bushes or even planters in public spaces. Likewise with the worm tea.





# COMMON FAQ'S CONTINUED

**WHERE DO I PUT MY WORMERY? INDOORS OR OUTDOORS? WHICH TEMPERATURES ARE OPTIMUM FOR MY WORMS?** Composting with worms operates year-around. You can place your wormery either indoors or outdoors. It is important to always ensure that the earthworms have an optimal temperature of approximately 20 °C/ 68 °F as well as a correct level of moisture in the substrate. During winter you shouldn't leave your wormery without insulation, so it doesn't freeze through. In the summer it shouldn't be exposed to direct sunlight, to prevent water evaporation and overheating. The temperature in your wormery should not drop below 5 °C or exceed 25 °C.

**WHAT SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T I PUT INTO MY WORMERY?** Your wormery composter is particularly suitable for peelings and leftovers of fruit and vegetables, such as potato peels, apple cores, green tops of vegetables, etc. Don't forget tea-bags, as worms often reproduce in them. Just be careful not to put in the plastic types (usually in pyramid shape sold with more expensive teas). Coffee grounds and paper coffee filters are also suitable. So are left overs of cooked vegetables, crushed egg shells, paper napkins, dampened cardboard, dry baked goods and remainders of indoor and outdoor plants. Do not put intensely spicy foods into your wormery, such as ginger or an excessive amount of citruses, as well as milk products, meat products, bones, oils, lard and other fats.

## WILL COMPOST WELL

Cooked Food Scraps, Tea Leaves, Coffee

Grounds and Vegetable Peelings

Dried & Crushed Egg Shells

(help worms digest)

Shredded & scrunched Paper or Cardboard

(helps stop the contents getting too wet)

Vacuum Cleaner Dust, Hair, Wool & Cotton

## DO NOT COMPOST

Citric Fruits (causes acidic conditions)

Plant Seeds (not dead so not eaten by worms)

Diseased Plant Material (may upset worms)

Glossy Printed Paper (too many additives)

Grass Clippings and Leaves (heat up)

Glass, Plastic and Metal (not biodegradable)

Dog/Cat Droppings (carry human pathogens)

Anything in excess!

## ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

If there are any other queries you have about your new Urbalive Wormery or Worm Composting please don't hesitate to give our Office Wigglets a call on **01981 500391** (Open 10-1 Mon-Fri), drop us an email to **WIGGLY@WIGGLYWIGGLERS.CO.UK**, or send us a message on Facebook at **FACEBOOK.COM/WIGGLYWIGGLERS!**