



## WORM COTTAGE

### Startup Guide

Install the valve in the base and make sure it's tight. Install the legs into the base and flip it over. This base will collect excess water that can be used in houseplants. Install the first tray and keep the others for future use.



#### Bedding preparation

In a large bowl or bucket, place the coconut fiber with 2 cups of lukewarm water so that it swells and breaks into pieces. More water may be needed, add as much as necessary for the coco brick to be fully expanded and fluffy. This may take time.



In the meantime in another large bowl or bucket, soak the cardboard for about 30 mins and drain and squeeze excess water, then add 1 tablespoon of soil amendment.

When the coco is fully expanded, add and mix the coco with the cardboard containing soil amendment.

When available, add 1 cup of outside soil or ripe homemade compost (no bagged soil). This provides the microorganisms necessary for the good start of the vermicomposter. If you bought worms with the composter, our bedding already contains the required beneficial bacterias to help the startup process.

Mix everything together, add water as needed, until the mixture is moist, but not soggy. Squeeze a part of the mixture in your hand, it should run 1-2 drops, no more. If the mixture is too wet, add a little dry cardboard to obtain the desired humidity.

#### First tray

Place 2 sheets of newspaper at the bottom of the tray, the ink color is not toxic, only avoid glossy papers. Spread your previously prepared mixture evenly on the newspaper and add the worms on top. Leave a light on so the worms integrate into their new home. Once the worms disappear, place the provided coco blanket on top (you can soak it prior), this helps keep the humidity in and will cover the bedding to better prevent fruit flies. Wait until the next day before feeding them. Go according to the worm's quantity, knowing that worms eat half their body weight per day (after the first 2 weeks of adaptation). Start slow, see how it goes, never overfeed, you should never smell rotten food, that means you overfed. With each feeding, add browns (see section below). It is possible that some will venture on the walls or even under the lid, it is normal, they are exploring!

#### Additional trays

When your first tray is full, add a 2nd (or third) tray and start feeding it. Since it is best to cover the food so that it is not out in the open, bring a small amount of bedding from the 1st tray to cover your 1st feed. Add 1 tablespoon of rock dust to each new tray to give the worms what they need to assimilate food.

### Check moisture, specially at startup

Use provided soil meter, check that the humidity is around 8 on the 0-10 scale. The mixture must always remain well moist, without being soggy. Decomposing fruits / vegetables will also create moisture, so it is most likely that you will not have to add any water, if the humidity drops too much, use a small spray bottle with warm water.

### PH verification

Provided PH meter gives you a indication of the acidity in the bin. It should indicate a neutral pH between 6.5 and 8. Regularly add rinsed and then crushed eggshells to keep a neutral pH. Crushed oyster shell is also a good natural PH balancer. A tablespoon of pure Oyster shell can balance an acidic bin in no time.

### Feeding

The worms need to have a balanced ratio between the materials rich in carbon also called "brown" (packing box, pizza box, egg carton, roll of toilet paper, newspapers...) and those rich in nitrogen, called "green" (mainly fruits / vegetables but also in small quantities bread, pizza crust, baked pasta). This ratio should be 1:1. This parameter is essential for the balance of your vermicomposter. Worms have a good appetite for anything that would normally go to your compost. The presence of ink is not a problem. The toxic metals it contained in the past are now banned. Glossy or heavily printed paper should still be avoided.

Cut out your waste so that it is not too big (pieces of about 2 cm). The more finely chopped they are, the more quickly they will be degraded by the worms. Store your waste in a container, tightly closed to avoid odors, at room temperature. This storage gives the worms slightly wilted food. Microorganisms will have developed and will be used to feed the worms. Empty this container into the vermicomposter once to three times a week, without forgetting to cover the waste with a thin layer of litter. Try to alternate the places where you bury waste. To prevent fruit flies even further in the vermicomposter, freeze your food and thaw it, the frost kills any fly larvae that might be on the surface of the peels. Burying a bit is the best way to prevent fruit flies.

### Exceptions

Your new friends dislike certain foods such as: onion, garlic, leek and all citrus fruits (also very acidic). A few pieces here and there will eventually disappear without a problem, but avoid the large amounts of orange peel from the morning juice! Other foods such as dairy products, meat and fish, sauces and prepared foods should not go to the vermicomposter.

### Collect the compost

When your 3 trays are all full, often after 3 months, remove the bottom tray, it should contain a nice, rich compost and hardly any worms since they have all migrated upwards to the fresh food. Rinse the tray if necessary and put it back on top, it becomes your new feeder tray. Repeat with each full tray for a constant supply of rich compost.

CAUTION: This compost is alive! It should never be long in an airtight container or a bag without ventilation, it must breathe in order to stay "alive". It can be stored for several months for future use. Best way to keep it is in sand bags, available in many stores.

Happy vermicomposting !