



## General quick startup guide

Here is a short guide for users of a homemade bin or a vermicomposter in general. The items mentioned refer to the components of our starter kit.

### Bedding preparation

In a large bowl or bucket, place the coconut fiber brick 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 then 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.

### Startup

For composters with an opening at the base, place 3-4 sheets of newspaper or at the bottom of the composter, the ink color is not toxic, just avoid glossy papers. This step prevents worms from being tempted by the exit from the start, once acclimatized, they will no longer be tempted! Spread your previously prepared mixture evenly on the newspaper and add the worms on top. Leave a light on so the worms settle into their new home. Once the worms are gone, place 2 more sheets of damp newspaper on top and wait until the next day before feeding them, then put the lid on.

Feed according to the quantity of worms, knowing that the 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, it means you have overfed. Remember to add as much brown (cardboard, newspapers, see section below) as green (kitchen scraps).

It is possible and normal that some venture on the walls or even under the lid, it is normal, they explore!

### Nematodes

If you have beneficial nematodes, insert the biodegradable bag in the middle of the material, with moisture, they will gradually release to prevent fruit flies. Each bag is suitable for up to 5 gallons of material.

### Check moisture, specially at startup

Using the supplied soil meter or a plant hygrometer, check that the humidity is around 8 on the 0-10 scale. The mixture must always remain moist, without being soggy. Fruits/vegetables, as they break down, will also create moisture, so chances are you'll never have to add water.

### PH verification

The supplied pH reader gives you an indication of the acidity in the tank. It should indicate a neutral pH between 6.5 and 7. 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 out an acidic bin in no time.

### Feeding

Worms need to have a balanced ratio between materials rich in carbon also called "brown" (packaging cardboard, pizza box, egg carton, roll of toilet paper, newspapers...) and those rich in nitrogen too called "green" (mainly fruits/vegetables but also in small quantities bread, pizza crust, cooked pasta). This ratio should be 1:1 by volume. This parameter is essential to 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. However, glossy or heavily printed paper should be avoided.

Cut your scraps so that they are not too big, especially the first weeks (pieces of about 2 cm). The more finely chopped they are, the faster they will be degraded by worms and bacterias. Store your waste in a well-closed container to avoid odors at room temperature. This storage allows the worms to be given slightly wilted food. Micro-organisms will have developed and will be used to feed the worms. Empty this container into the vermicomposter one to three times a week, remembering to cover the waste with a thin layer of litter. Try alternating where you bury trash. To avoid fruit flies in the vermicomposter, you can freeze your food and thaw it, freezing kills any fly larvae that may be on the surface of the peels and speeds up decomposition by breaking down food tissue.

### 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.

### Collecting the compost

Often after 3-4 months you can start harvesting compost, you need to feed continuously for several weeks on the same side to encourage horizontal migration. Remove the compost from the opposite side, there shouldn't be too many worms left. If necessary, make cones on a well-lit work surface and gradually remove the first layer of material every 5-10 mins. You will be left with a ball of worms that you can put back in the vermicomposter.

For trays systems, when all your trays are full, 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.

For Hungry Bin and Worm Bags, since these are continuous flow, feed on top and collect at bottom. After roughly 3 months, you can start collecting your compost and so on a regular basis depending on the quantity of worms, the pace may differ. Compost should be all black without leftover uneaten food.

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 !