



First Time Worm Farmers

Your Worm Farming 101 Guide To:

- Starting A New Worm Farm
- Pocket Feeding For Best Results



By Brian "The Worm Man" Donaldson

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Introduction

THANK YOU for looking at my Worm Farming 101 For Beginners guide. It's always great to help new people.

If you don't know me, I'm a Commercial Worm Farmer, professional Educator and E-book author. I'm qualified in two Horticulture disciplines and qualified to teach Horticulture and worm farming.

You can find my biography at www.thewormman.com.au/about-me

I hope that this guide helps you - if you want more free info, please see my student's resource page at www.thewormman.com.au/help

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- Hot Weather Tips - learn how to best cool a worm farm and the things you may be doing wrong, like using ice or water !
- Aerated Castings Tea DIY info - learn how to use ONE CUP OF CASTINGS to make a tea to apply to up to 650 square metres of garden !
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How To Feed - The Pocket Feeding System

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WHY Pocket Feed?

When you start out, it is VERY hard to understand what the worms are eating.

It is VERY EASY to overfeed and kill your worms. Pocket feeding is the solution !

How To Pocket Feed

- Dig a hole in one corner of the bin. Think of it as corner #1.

(See the diagram on the next page.)

- Place new dry bedding in the hole, in proportion to the food volume - use more bedding than food. Using dry bedding helps absorb the juices and stops them leaching down into the bin.

- Place the food on the bedding. Just 1 to 2 cups per 1000 worms.

- Shake some worm farm conditioner over the food - about a teaspoon (garden lime, rock dust, ground eggshells etc., for minerals and grit)

- Cover it over with what you dug out.

- The next time you feed, feed the next corner around in the bin. (See the diagram on the next page.)

Then . . .

- After doing 4 feeds in a normal worm farm, don't feed the fifth time (over the top of the first feed) until you see most of the first feed is gone. Some woody things like broccoli stalks sometimes take a little longer, as long as most of the food is gone, continue feeding.

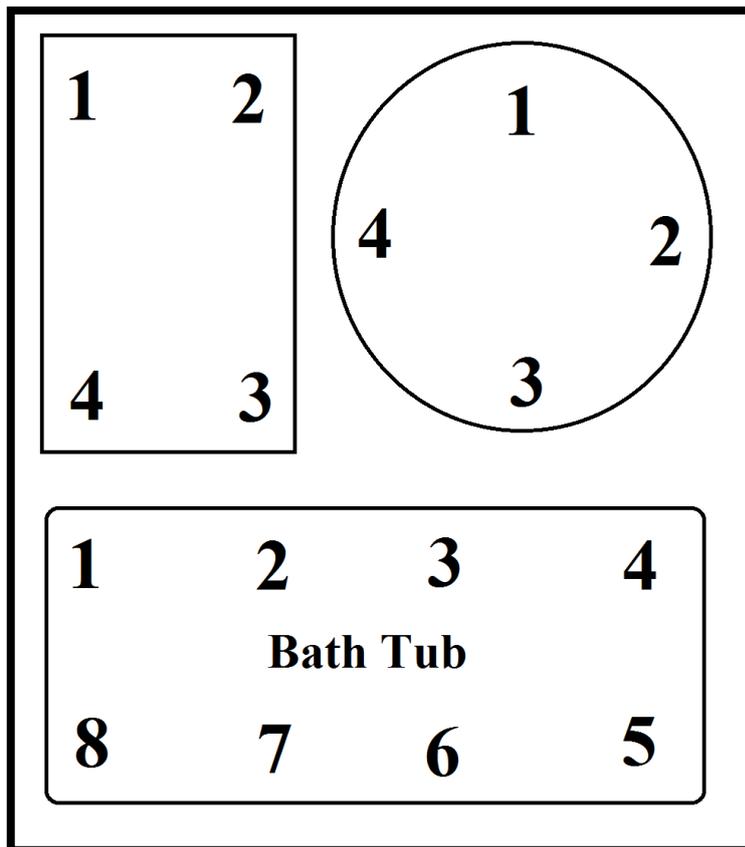
- Continue in this way to avoid over feeding.

- As your population of worms and microbes increases, they will eat more food, more quickly.

- In a month try increasing the food amount by 50%.

Using pocket feeding, your worms will never be overfed and suffer from protein/ammonia poisoning etc.

(Some people like to use a little stick to mark the last position that they fed.)



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Moisture & Moisture Control:

The bedding should be pre moistened - grab handfuls, dip into water and then wring out.

It should be as moist as a wrung out sponge.

You should be able to squeeze a handful of bedding and have a few drops of water to a small trickle of water come out of it. In a farm that has a drain, you can err on the side of it being a little too moist.

Adding too much moisture is bad. If you create ANY - leachate ("worm wee") in the bottom tray of a multi level farm, it indicates you're adding too much moisture, or not putting enough dry bedding under the food to balance it.

Read about LEACHATE on the HELP page - see why the scientists hate it and the pros are not happy with it - and how to use it wisely.

BEDDING In A Worm Farm - What Is It, Why Add It & When To Add It

Bedding - Also Called Browns Or Carbon

The material in our farms that the worms live in (and also eat) is known as "Bedding, Browns or Carbon." It is a material containing a lot of carbon - commonly cardboard, newspaper, aged grass/leaves - or in "bought" worm farms, it may be a brick of coco coir or peat.

We have to supply this as it is the worms' "home."

The kitchen scraps you feed the worms are called "Food, Greens or Nitrogen."

Bedding helps simulate the worms' natural environment - they don't live in their "food".

The bedding allows a safe zone for the worms to retreat to in case of food being added that heats up (especially in summer); or conditions like heat or cold making the worms retreat from the surface.

It also creates air pockets and air penetration into the farm.

You need to add bedding whenever feeding. This helps create a light fluffy aerated environment and balances out the food - making castings lighter and easier to deal with.

Too little bedding/too much food is the commonest way to kill worms, or to have an unsuccessful worm farm or castings that is hard to use or harvest.

WHAT TO USE AS BEDDING - Cardboard & Newspaper - Or Office Paper?

Cardboard is best, so if we can, we want mostly cardboard, maybe 4 to 5 parts of cardboard, to one part newspaper and one part well-aged leaves and grass.

If your worm farm came with a coco brick, use that. You don't have to buy more in future and if you are starting an old farm up, just make the bedding yourself.

Which Cardboard Is Best?

Toilet roll tubes, egg cartons, and "fluted" brown cardboard boxes are great - a little printing on them is fine. You can ask the supermarket for some.

Avoid highly glossy boxes, like high end products come in.

Newspaper:

Colored ink in newspapers is OK. Inks are soy based these days, so not an issue.

Best ripped into strips and then rolled into balls. Don't layer it as it may turn hard.

(Use about 4 to 5 parts of ripped up cardboard, 1 part newspaper balls and 1 part leaves and grass.)

Office Paper:

A little is OK, but it is less desirable than newspaper; cardboard is best.

It may be harder to provide aeration with office paper if shredded as it easily becomes mushy and then dries to create a hard layer.

Using too much may make castings look lighter, or take a little longer to break down, due to the bleach.

Toner is also of no concern.

Grass & Leaves:

When it is a fresh, green lush grass, it is more of a "food" - so never put much in at once.

When it is dry and sparse, it is more of a bedding, but still a food.

Pile it up when mowing, and after 4 to 6 weeks, you can start to add a handful per week, of old dry grass or old leaves - the worms love them.

In a new farm, use grass in moderation so you don't start a hot compost reaction.

If you have them, use handfuls of old leaves from your garden.

(Use about 4 to 5 parts of ripped up cardboard, 1 part newspaper balls and 1 part leaves and grass.)

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Old Wives Tales, Misinformation & Common Mistakes

There are a lot of old wives tales doing the rounds and if people don't get taught the correct thing, the misinformation just gets taught to more and more people.

There are also some common mistakes people make. Here are some of the main culprits:

Common Misinformation:

1. The fallacy: "Freezing and grinding worm food makes them eat more/quicker."

It does NOT make them eat more or quicker when compared to pocket feeding and natural decomposition. Freezing and grinding often lead to over feeding and nutrients leaching down through the bin, which stops worms from migrating upwards and makes your castings tray muddy and wet and hard to deal with. You are just wasting time and electricity and making your harvesting really hard.

2. The fallacy: "worms don't eat the food, they eat microbes. "

It's partly true - the worms diet IS microbes, but they cannot consume microbes without consuming the substrate (bedding and food, rotting down). The substrate is further decomposed as it travels through the worms gut, becoming "castings." If the worm's don't eat the food/substrate, where do castings come from? They are said to be able to re-consume substrate up to 5 times.

They can actually break off and "eat" pieces of food with their everted pharynx. For a Youtube video showing this fact, see www.TheWormMan.com.au/worm-feeding

Some Common Mistakes:

1. Overfeeding - the most common way for worm farms to fail or not operate well . . .

In the real world, worms can only eat their weight in food once to twice per week and the same in bedding. Start feeding 1 to 2 cups of food per week per 1000 worms in your system. Pocket feed for best results. The thing you read about eating their weight each day is in laboratory controlled conditions with optimised systems, food and bedding and includes bedding. Real world figures matter more.

2. Under bedding - goes hand-in-hand with over feeding . . .

You should add bedding/carbon/browns with every feeding, in proportion to the food, erring on the side of too extra bedding. This is very important. Farms that do not have enough bedding suffer from wet muddy conditions and castings; the worms suffer and the whole system may eventually fail.

3. Over watering & LEACHATE (it's NOT worm pee) - leachate is bad ** - its the toilet water from the worm farm.**

Don't produce it on purpose - read the LEACHATE INFO SHEET, it's possibly poisonous to people, plants and pets. Cover farms from rain if they have air holes in the lid (keeping the air holes open when covering.) If you love leachate, read up on it, possibly switch your passion to getting the castings, the REAL GOLD, make aerated tea with the castings, the difference will astonish you.

4. Seeing all insects (anything not a worm) as pests.

All sorts of insects are a natural part of a healthy soil, compost or worm farm. If the population of insects is out of whack, it's because of something they like better than worms. Possible culprits are over feeding, under bedding and over watering - or not feeding properly. Check out the pocket feeding instructions.

5. Garden lime or dolomite is not a pesticide.

Apart from mites, insects are NOT controlled by adding lime. Yes, worm farms need lime/conditioner. Mites do have a population response to acidic conditions and therefore the lime neutralises the acidity - correcting the conditions. The bad conditions are often from over feeding under bedding and over watering.

6. Use of Diatomaceous Earth (DE) in treating insects - and the fallacy that it has to be dry to work, so worms cant be harmed by it.

I have the qualification (and qualified to teach it) and the licence to spray herbicides commercially and I have spoken at length with one of the largest suppliers of DE.

DE can be applied IN WATER, so that puts paid to the fallacy that it cant hurt anything unless its dry. DE is said (by a huge pro farmer) to be able to harm worms. It will also kill ALL beneficial insects in your bin. I have used it to test it against mites and witnessed total bin collapse some weeks or months later. Read #4.

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