

Managing & Maintaining the Worm HangOut

Worms like to eat...

All fruit rinds, skins, peels and cores; under or overripe, slimy, and moldy fruit. All canned fruit is fine.

All vegetables, cooked, canned or raw; vegetable trimmings

All grain products such as rice, noodles, cereal and bread (soak bread first for best results). Feed grains sparingly.

Corn cobs and husks, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags

Avoid meat, dairy, fats, oils, and papaya SEEDS.

Care and feeding

You can feed worms on any schedule you wish, even every day. Most people, however, find it convenient to save up food scraps in a container and feed only once or twice a week. Your HangOut worm colony will ultimately process 5-10 pounds of food weekly.

Feed less in the beginning to give the decomposer ecosystem time to develop and your worm colony a chance to expand. In good conditions, worms will double their population every 60 days until they reach a density of 1-2 pounds per square foot of surface area.

You can influence feeding rate by pre-processing food waste. To speed up processing, chop your food waste into small pieces, and/or freeze it. (Thaw before feeding!) If you have reason to slow consumption – because you are going on vacation, for example – present food waste in big chunks and it will take longer to break down.

To feed, lift or push aside the shredded paper cover and place your layer of food waste on top of the bed. You may wish to mix in some of the old or new shredded paper with the food to break it up a bit.

Re-position the deteriorating paper cover, then add another several inches of fresh fluffy shredded paper.

Add enough water to completely soak the new layer of bedding. Water your worms frequently – they benefit from a cool shower daily – water until it drips out the bottom.

Harvesting in 5 easy steps

After feeding, adding paper and water for 6 to 12 months, it's time to harvest your first batch of vermicast.

One week prior to your harvest, STOP WATERING. The worms will all gather at the top of the bin to be close to the moist food.

Use a 12-quart dish pan or other shallow container as your harvesting box.

1 Have a seat on the floor. Untie the cords, loosen the toggles and fully open the bottom of the bag.

2 Reach your hand into the opening and wiggle your fingers to loosen and dislodge the material.

3 On your **first harvest only**, the initial batch of material that will fall into the box will be the coconut coir fiber – the original base bedding – which will be only partially decomposed. Put the coir back into the HangOut from the top to continue breaking down.

It will be obvious when you “hit” vermicast. It will be a different color and texture than the coir.

4 Continue wiggling your fingers until you have filled your harvesting box with vermicast. Stop when you hit food. You will get 10-15 pounds on your first harvest.

5 Pull the drawstrings and tighten the toggles to close the opening. Gently punch the compressed material down to fill the bottom.

Repeat this quick and easy procedure as needed. Some colonies are ready to be harvested at six months; some can go as long as a year. **Each time following your harvest, add several inches of fresh bedding to the top of the bed to replace the volume of material you removed.**

Need professional help? Harvest Service is available from Waikiki Worm Co. Contact mindy@waikikiworm.net.

