

# The First Cycle - Moving Up & Harvesting

It takes six to nine months – on average – to bring your Can-O-Worms to capacity. You will be richly rewarded for your patience! Once at capacity, or “fully charged,” your colony of two or three pounds of worms will be able to process several pounds of food waste weekly and will provide you with an ongoing supply of highly concentrated, nutrient-rich vermicast.

**1**

## Fill the first working tray

Feed your worms in the first working tray for two to three months. This is typically the time it takes to process the original coir bedding and weeks of food, paper and cardboard to a depth of three inches. The top of the plastic vertical ribs is your marker for three inches deep. Push aside the paper cover and half-eaten food to locate the vertical ribs. The dark finished material (vermicast) should be at least to the top of the ribs.

**2**

## Add the second working tray

Remove all the half-eaten food, paper, cardboard, etc. ABOVE the level of the vertical ribs and place it into the second working tray. In other words, the top three inches of material in the first tray become the bottom three inches of material in the second tray. When you place the second tray on top, its mesh bottom should sit flush on the bed of finished material of the first tray, and rest on the vertical ribs.

You have essentially just slipped a tray into the worm’s bed. They will not even notice it – from the worm’s perspective, the bed is continuous. Because they are surface feeders, they will gradually migrate up through the holes.



*Find the top of the 3” vertical ribs. The processed material should be at least three inches deep.*



*Move the top three inches of material from the first tray to “start” the second tray.*



*Once you have moved up to the second tray, you will feed, cover, and water in the second tray only.*

Now in the second tray, re-establish your pattern of burying food waste under paper and adding paper to maintain 2 to 3 inches of bedding material on top of the food. Water generously.

You can forget about the first working tray for now – the worms will continue to work on the remaining decaying organic matter.

**3****Fill the second working tray**

Feed your worms for another two to three months in the second tray, until the processed material is three inches deep – up to the level of the vertical ribs.

**4****Add the third working tray**

When the second tray is filled, following the *exact same procedure*, remove all the half-eaten food, paper, cardboard, etc. ABOVE the level of the vertical ribs of the second tray and place it into the third working tray. When you place the third tray, the mesh bottom should sit flush on the bed of finished material of the second tray and rest on the vertical ribs.

Once again, your worms will gradually migrate up to the top, although they will continue to process the material throughout the entire system.

**When your third tray is filled, it's time to harvest your first batch of vermicast.**

**5****Harvest the vermicast**

By the time your third tray is full, the material in the first working tray will have been thoroughly processed.

Clear out the material above the vertical ribs exactly as you have done before when you added the second and third trays. Because you don't have a new tray to put it in (yet), place the material temporarily in a bucket and cover it with a batch of moist shredded paper. It's OK if some worms come along.

Lift off the top two trays and remove the bottom tray, which is filled with finished vermicast as well as some worms. The top two trays go back on, and the bottom tray is rotated to the top. It should fit right on top of the tray you have just cleared.

The finished vermicast will be quite compressed, so get in there with your fingers and loosen it – really fluff it up. Go slowly and gently so you don't hurt any worms.

Then simply leave the lid off and walk away. In some cases, within 30 minutes or so, any worms in the tray will have gone down through the pukas to the tray below– remember they will always move away from light. Sometimes it will take a day.

Remove the finished vermicast – worm free – and the new top tray is ready to go. Add the contents of the bucket, plenty of fresh bedding, food, and a shredded paper cover.

The process is now on-going. In two or three months, repeat this procedure. You will get 10-15 pounds of vermicast at each harvest.

## Maintenance

To keep air and water flowing freely beneath the bin, it is beneficial to wash out the collection tray every few months to keep it clean and clear. Worms like to crawl around in the collection tray and may clog up the ventilation holes and spigot with their castings.

Simply lift off the working trays, gently hose any worms out the spigot into a bucket (they don't mind going for a short swim). They will sink to the bottom. Pour off the liquid, put the worms back in their bed and crank up the water pressure to shoot out the ventilation holes and spigot. Since you are switching trays around anyway, it's most convenient to perform this maintenance at harvest time.