

# 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 4,000-6,000 worms will be able to process several pounds of food waste daily 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 three to four 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 4 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 three to four 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 rotating the bottom tray to the top**

By the time your third tray is full, the material in the first working tray will have been thoroughly processed. Although there is not a lot left to eat down there, a number of adult worms will be hanging out in the moist material.

Exactly as you have done as you moved up to each new tray, remove all material (shredded paper, half-eaten food, vermicast, worms, whatever) from the top three inches of the top tray – everything above the level of the vertical ribs. This time, because you have no tray to put this stuff into, place it temporarily in a bucket. Now lift the top two trays and remove the bottom tray. The two top trays drop down a notch and the bottom tray now goes on top, nesting inside the tray below.

Gently and slowly – so you don't hurt any worms – thoroughly fluff up the compressed vermicast with your fingers. Leave the lid off and give the worms 30 minutes or so to go down. Then start removing the cast, inch by inch. Any worms who have not moved down will do so as they are exposed to light. By the time you have removed all the vermicast from the tray, the worms will have crawled through the pukas to the tray below. Then dump in your bucket of shredded paper and half-eaten food and re-establish your pattern of feeding and adding plenty of shredded paper on top of the food.

**6****Repeat the process as the top tray fills**

The process is now on-going. The worms migrate continuously up through the system, and you harvest 10-20 pounds of finished vermicast every three months or so from the bottom tray.

Your vermicast is fairly muddy straight out of the bin. You can spread it out to dry, crumbling it with your fingers as it dries out. Don't let it dry out completely. You can use it right away or store it in a container with ventilation holes.

## 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 tend to 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.