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In Local News....

Home Vermicomposting: Using Food scraps and Worms to make “Black Gold” Learn how to Make Your Own at the Upcoming Vermicompost Workshop

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Vermicomposting is the process of using worms to digest food waste to produce a nutrient and microbe rich soil amendment that is known as vermicompost (*vermi* – being latin for worm). This compost is sometimes referred to as “black gold” because when mixed with the soil the plants are grown in, it is extremely valuable to the health and growth of the plants. Research has shown that vermicompost can have twice the available nutrients as standard compost (i.e. compost made in a compost pile) due to the additional process of the feed stock being digested by the worms. This process also serves encourage the growth of beneficial microbes with in turn help to lower the incidence of plant diseases caused by soil borne and foliar plant pathogens and pests.

Vermicomposting can easily and cheaply be done on a small scale in most homes as an effective way of recycling food scraps. It is especially nice during the winter months for those who normally compost outside during the warmer months, but find it difficult or impossible to do so during the winter. A vermicompost bin in the home takes up little space, is relatively low maintenance, and does not have an odor if managed correctly.

To start vermicomposting, basic supplies needed include, a bin, worms, and bedding material such as newspaper. Vermicompost bins can be easily made with Rubbermaid type bins, five gallon buckets or purchased through a supplier, although the ready- made purchase option is usually much more expensive than making your own.

Two species of worms are generally preferred for compost bins, these are red wigglers (*Eisenia fetida*) and redworms (*Lumbricus rubellus*). These species work well in bins because they are easy to keep, adapt well to the bin environment, will reproduce in captivity, and are surface feeders, rather than burrowers. In general, night crawlers and worms found in the soil in your yard, will not do well in compost bins. Worms to be used for vermicomposting can easily be ordered from a choice of suppliers.

Once a bin and worms have been obtained, it is simply a matter of readying the bin and learning how to

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feed and manage your worms. Worms in general are not picky eaters and can be fed fruit and vegetable trimmings, grains, beans, and breads, egg shells, coffee grounds, lawn clippings, and fallen leaves. Worms should not be fed meat products, dairy products, or oil products as these will create a strong smell and may attract pests. Additionally, it is also not recommended to feed worms citrus peels, onions, or garlic.

If you are interested in learning how to vermicompost in your home there is an abundance of information available on the internet including CCE Franklin's website at <http://franklin.cce.cornell.edu/gardening/compost-resources>. Additionally, a hands on, **Vermicomposting Workshop is being offered on Saturday, March 21 from 1-3pm at the Paul Smith's College VIC**. This workshop will cover the basics of vermicomposting and will give you the opportunity to start your own bin. The workshop fee is \$35 per person/couple/family and includes one bin and worms. Pre-registration is REQUIRED by Friday, March 13, so supplies can be ordered. Registration can be completed online by going to Events at franklin.cce.edu or by calling (518)483-7403.

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