

ph: 02-44745903
fax: 02-44745903
email: info@eurodevices.com.au



Shop address: 15B Church St
MORUYA
N.S.W. 2537

FACT SHEET

WORM FARMING

- The management and breeding of worms is known as VERMICULTURE
- Worms are one of nature's ultimate recyclers
- They can live for a long time (15 years or more)
- They have both male and female reproductive organs
- They can be bred easily at home or at school
- They can be used to recycle organic waste from your kitchen into valuable fertiliser
- They produce castings (worm poo!) which have a neutral pH
- Their castings increase the amount of nutrient available to your plants by up to 10 times.
- Their castings increase crop and pasture yields
- They increase the level of essential microbial activity in the soil
- They can consume their own body weight in food every day
- They double in population every 2-3 months in ideal conditions
- A mature compost worm can produce an egg capsule every 7-10 days in ideal conditions.
- Worm eggs can survive in difficult situations for quite a time.
- When handling worm castings, always wear gloves because acid in human skin makes eggs infertile.
- Worms do not eat raw vegetable matter, they eat the by-product of decomposition of raw vegetable matter.
- **Worms love to eat**
- Fruit (non acidic)
- Vegetables
- Leftovers
- Moistened non-glossy paper
- Egg cartons
- Tea leaves / bags
- Coffee grounds (in moderation)
- Cooked grains and pulses
- Cardboard
- Broken down foods (the smaller the better)
- Manures – particularly horse
- Wet shredded cardboard or paper acts as a bulking agent and aerator. This will speed up the breakdown process
- **Worms tend not to eat**
- The citrus family
- Uncooked onion or garlic
- Chilli
- Volatile oils, for example: eucalyptus leaves
- High protein substances, such as meat, bones, tofu (small amounts are acceptable)
- Cat and dog poo (due to associated health risks)
- Bread (small amounts are acceptable)
- Uncooked grains and pulses
- Garden clippings (small amounts are acceptable)

Which Worms Are For You?

There are about 350 species of earthworms in Australia, with many different habits. So it is important to make sure you have the right earthworms for your application. The CSIRO has described the broad categories of earthworms as:

Composters - composting organic wastes, reared for fish bait, and production of soil conditioner.

Earthworkers - live 'free' in the soil, improve soil conditions and promote plant growth.

The type of worm which you need to get started in a worm factory are the 'composters'. Tigers, and Reds are the most common 'composters' and are not normally found in the soil. They survive only in an organic-rich environment where moisture is maintained throughout the year. These worms are not suited to soils and should be kept 'in captivity', where food and moisture are carefully controlled.

'Composters' in your Worm Factory will produce worm manure called castings or vermicompost which can be used in your garden as a soil improver. For example, in pots as an additive to potting mixture, around plants as a top dress fertilizer, or as an additive to seed raising mixes.

Worms are nature's own recyclers, converting your kitchen scraps and garden waste, not only for free, but in the process creating a nutrient-rich plant food.

How do you use by-products of a worm farm?

- Castings: Straight onto the garden or as potting mix. Can be dried and used like "Dynamic Lifter"
- Liquid Fertiliser: Dilute to a weak tea colour and use as a fertilizer or foliar spray.

Trouble shooting:

Condition	Symptoms	Remedies
Too wet (common) into the bedding.	Unpleasant odours	Tear up some dry newspaper or egg cartons and gently bury them

There is not enough oxygen in the farm, causing a smelly anaerobic process

Too dry	Slow break down	Spray the bedding layer repeatedly to keep it moist. Keep a wet newspaper or Hessian layer on the top of the bedding layer and remove the farm from the sunlight.
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Attracting many ants	Ants can be controlled by placing the legs of the farm in small buckets of water, or putting Vaseline around the base of the farm.
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Too acidic (common) smells at least 1 week.	Vinegar flies or sour	Stop feeding the worms fruit and coffee grind for at least 1 week. Sprinkle approximately 2 tablespoons of garden lime or wood ash onto the food layer and spray with water.
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To alkaline (rare)	Excessive lime	Add more fruit.
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