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Make Your Own DIY Wormery

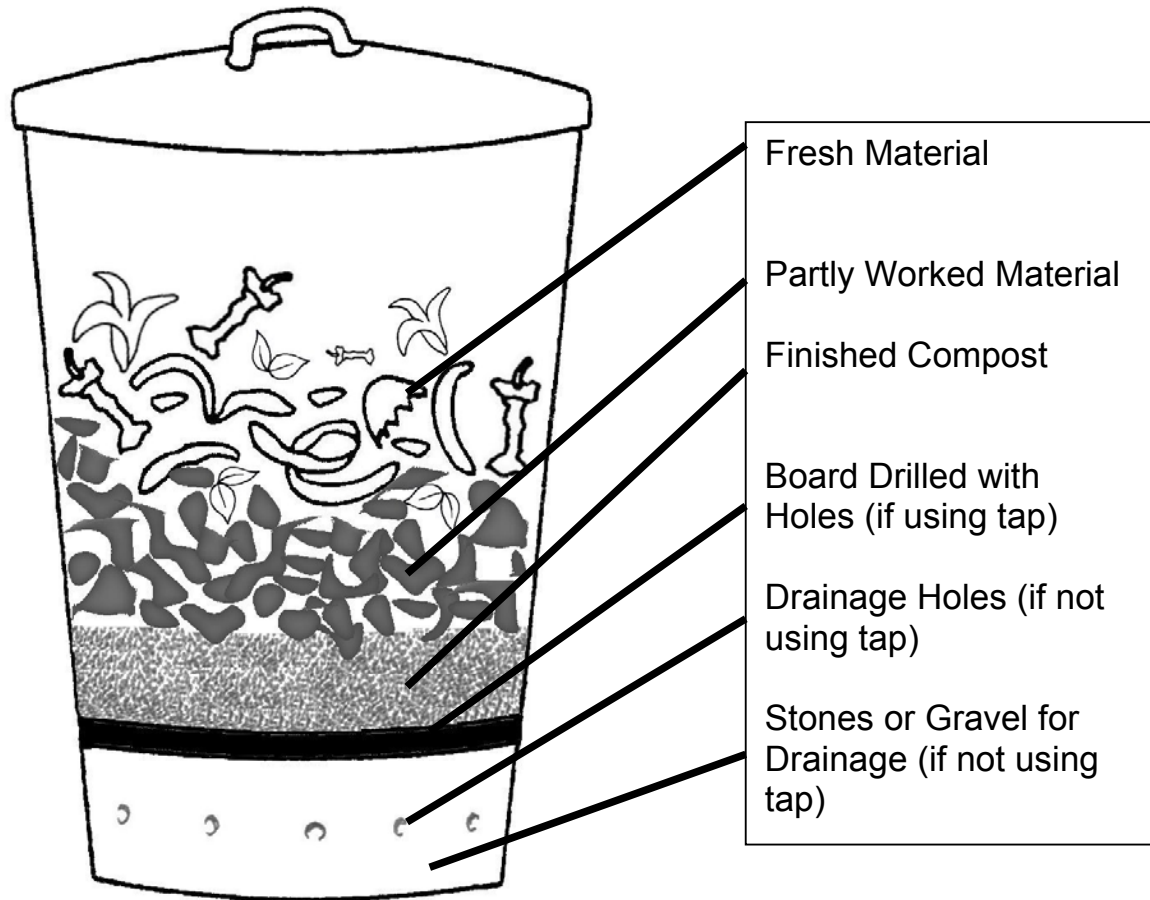


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DIY Outdoor Wormery

It is fairly easy to make your own wormery from an old plastic bin or water butt. The drawing above shows you how to set one up. Whatever you end up using, it needs to have a close fitting lid to keep the worms in and keep rain, flies and vermin out.

Plastic Bin

If using a plastic bin without a tap, start by drilling a few holes in the bottom to allow the liquid produced by the composting process to escape. Then put a layer of gravel or stones in the bottom of the bin to assist with drainage and stop all your worms from escaping.

Water Butt or Bin Fitted with Tap

If you wish to collect the liquid from your wormery to use as a liquid fertilizer you need a tap to allow you to drain it off. Plastic taps are available from most D.I.Y. shops and online. Simply drill or cut an appropriately sized hole and screw the tap in place. If you use a water butt the tap is already fitted.

To produce a sump to collect the liquid, you need to make a platform to separate the solid material from the liquid.

Use a jig-saw to cut a board or piece of plastic to fit inside your wormery. It needs to be fairly tight fitting to prevent too much compost or the worms getting into lower part of the bin (the sump). To allow the liquid to drain into the sump, you need to drill holes in the board approx a centimetre apart and a few millimetres in diameter. To create a platform, the board needs to be raised at least 5 centimetres above the level of the tap. Setting it on top of a brick or fitting a few wooden legs should provide adequate space.

Introducing the Worms

Once you have fitted your platform or filled the bottom of the bin with gravel, you are ready for the worms. Cover the platform or gravel with a sheet of cardboard followed by shredded newspaper. This will prevent the worms and material falling through the holes in the platform or discourage them from digging into the gravel. It also provides comfortable surroundings for the worms.

The paper and card needs to be moist before you introduce the worms so pour or spray water over it.

You are now ready to introduce worms into your wormery. You can buy worms from fishing shops, online, collect them from a garden compost heap or harvest them from somebody else's wormery. There is now a local company farming worms in County Down.

If you are collecting worms yourself, they must come from a compost heap or wormery. The worms you find in the soil or crawling about after the rain are earthworms. They do not like the rich environment of a wormery and will not do well. Compost worms, known as brandlings or tiger worms have buff/red stripes and normally live in piles of rotting organic material or in dung heaps. Ideally, you want to start with approx 500g of worms or your wormery will take a long time to really get going.

Start the worms off in a moist bedding of leaf mould, shop bought compost or coir. Coir, available from garden centres, is made from coconut husk and comes in a block that must be soaked in water before use. Place the bedding in the wormery on the paper and the worms go on top.

Add a handful of chopped up fruit/vegetable waste and cover the whole lot with another layer of damp shredded newspaper to keep everything moist.

When adding material to your wormery, the golden rule is little and often. How fast the worms process waste depends on how many there are and how warm it is. In winter the worms will slow right down and process very little waste. In the summer they will feed much faster, but you must be careful not to let them

dry out. You also need to avoid adding a lot of acidic scraps like citrus peel and onions.

Add more material when you can see the previous batch has been colonised by worms. If you add too much, the scraps may start to putrefy and smell. As the worms settle in and start to breed, you will be able to increase the volume of material added. You also need to regularly add shredded or crumpled newspaper and card. This gives the worms a more balanced diet, absorbs excess moisture preventing everything getting too soggy and creates air spaces in the compost.

When the bin is full, you will need to empty out the compost. Most of your worms will be in the top 30 centimetres or so. Remove this top layer of worms and uncomposted waste and set aside. Empty out the composted material, replace the platform (or gravel) in the bottom of the wormery and cover it with a layer of card and shredded newspaper. Replace the worms and uncomposted material and off you go again.

It is better to do this during spring or summer so there is a large volume of material to provide shelter when the cold weather comes.

Problem Solving

If the contents of your wormery start to smell, the worms aren't processing the material fast enough.

- There may be too much waste for the worms to process, so stop adding more material until the size of the colony has increased.
- It may be too wet. Try not to add any liquid with the waste and mix in scrunched up newspaper or card. If your wormery has a tap, drain any liquid from the sump and repeat every few days until no more liquid comes out.
- The contents might be too acidic. You need to neutralise the acid. Do this by adding calcified seaweed or crunched up dried eggshells.
- The temperature may be too low. Move the bin to a warmer location. If it's winter, reduce the amount you are feeding the worms. You can also insulate the wormery by wrapping it in bubble wrap, plastic or horticultural fleece.