

# **Worm farm** how-to guide



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# Haere mai Welcome

## What is a worm farm?

A worm farm is a system of containers which creates the perfect living environment for worms. Worms are Papatūānuku's natural recyclers. They digest food scraps into a nutritious material called 'worm castings', which is amazing food for your indoor plants, vegetable garden or trees.

# How to set up your worm farm

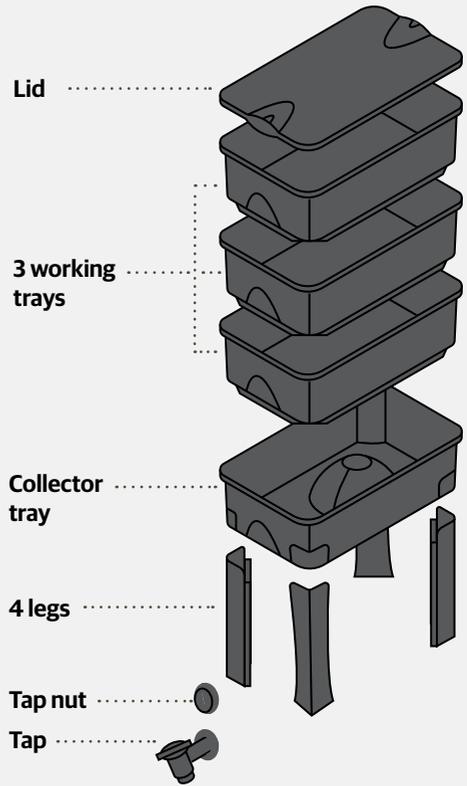
Your Tumbleweed Worm Café comes with a brochure from the manufacturer which is helpful for set up and installation. Once you have put it together, we recommend using this comprehensive guide created with help from expert composters in Wellington.

## Your worms

You will be sent a 250g container of live tiger worms in the post, about a week after you receive your worm farm. They will be in an ice cream container filled with soil and bedding. We will send you an email to remind you they are on their way. It is recommended to have your worm farm set up before the worms arrive.



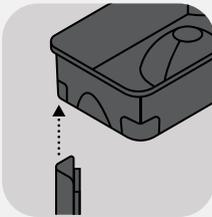
Worm bedding coir block



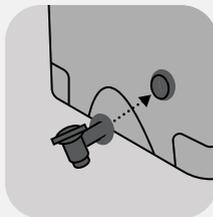
## Assembly

The Tumbleweed Worm Café is designed to be relatively mess-free and easy to set up and maintain. To put the unit together, follow these steps:

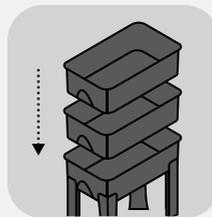
That's it! You're now ready to find the perfect spot for your worms' new home.



1. Slide legs into sockets in collector tray.



2. Screw tap and tap nut into the collector tray.



3. Stack working trays on top of collector tray.

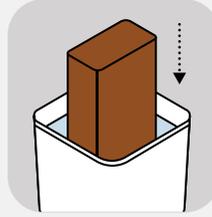


4. Fit lid to top of working tray.

# Installation

Find a nice sheltered spot away from direct sunlight where the worms are not going to overheat or freeze. This could be in the garden, porch or shed. It's a good idea to place the bin close to the kitchen, so no matter the weather it's a quick, easy job to feed your worms.

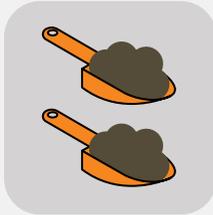
Now that you have a spot for your farm, it is time to get it ready for the worms to move in.



**1.** Soak the worm bedding coir block in half a bucket of water. After 15 mins, it will expand and break down into an even mix.



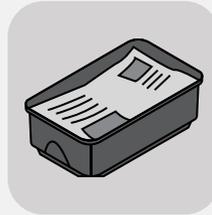
**2.** Use the cardboard packaging that your worm farm was wrapped in and fold it to fit on the floor of working tray 1. Evenly spread the worm bedding over this base.



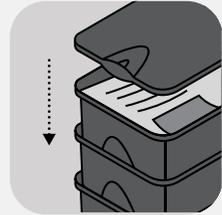
**3.** Mix in about two scoops of garden soil in with the bedding.



**4.** Gently empty the box of worms on top of the bedding. They will take a while to adjust to their new environment, so don't worry if they seem a little sleepy to start with.



**5.** Cover the worms and bedding with a worm blanket, this could be a layer of damp newspaper or an old damp tea towel.



**6.** Now place the lid on and let the worms settle in for a few days. This tray is where the worms will be living and dining.

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## The worms

The worms you will be supplied with are special composting worms, called tiger worms. Tiger worms eat fresh food like your food waste, which is too rich for earthworms.

**Tiger worm** .....



## Feeding your worms

To keep your worms happy, you need to feed them the right kinds of food.

Feed them mostly fruit and vegetable scraps, and make sure they have enough bedding like ripped-up paper or cardboard. They will slowly eat through this and also lay their eggs in this layer, which is really important to keep your worm farm going.

# What worms like to eat



**Chopped fruit and veggie scraps**



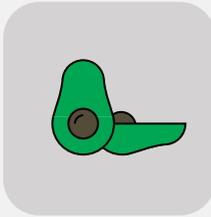
**Egg shells**  
washed and crushed up



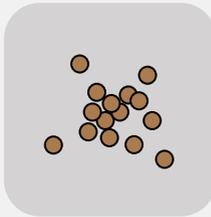
**Coffee grounds and tea leaves**



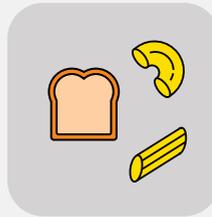
**Cooked and processed foods**  
that don't have too much dairy or meat



**Avocado**



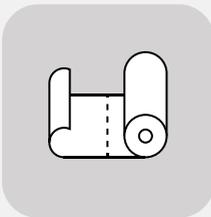
**Manure**  
from grass-eating herbivorous animals



**Bread and pasta**

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# Bedding materials



**Cut-up paper towels, paper, cardboard**  
It's best to soak these in water and squeeze out the excess before adding



**Wood shavings**  
untreated



**Garden waste and dried leaves**



**Twigs**  
small and broken-up

# What worms don't like to eat



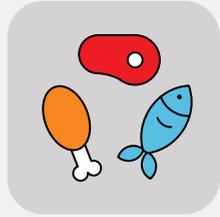
**Dog and cat poo**



**Oil and other liquids**  
whole cups of tea,  
spoil milk, broth



**Citrus fruits**  
lemons, limes,  
oranges



**Large amounts  
of meat**



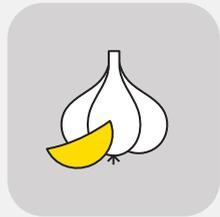
**Bones**



**Dairy products** such as  
cheese, milk and yogurt



**Chillies/spicy food**

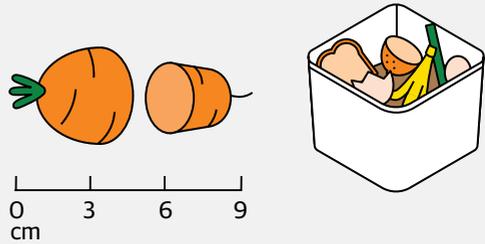


**Onions and garlic**

# Preparing the food

Cut everything up first so your worms can eat it faster. It is a good idea to have a container with a lid on your kitchen bench or under the sink, to collect the food scraps.

Worms are surface feeders, so when it is time to feed them, lift back their blanket and spread the fresh scraps over half of the surface.



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# Looking after your worms

For the first few days, don't give your worms anything to eat. Then just give them a small amount of food and wait until they have completely finished before giving them more.

After the worms have settled in, aim to feed them regularly - about every 1-2 days. This method is better than saving up all your scraps over the week and feeding the worms all at once.

If you notice the food in your worm farm is starting to rot and smell, you might be giving them too much. Just reduce it for a while until your worm farm comes right again. Worms tend to be more active and eat more in summer.

After about 6 months, the worm population will have built up and they will be able to process the same weight in food as their body weight, so if you estimate you have a cup full of worms, they can eat approximately a cup full of food every day.

## Tips

The bedding should remain damp, like a wrung out sponge. If it gets too dry, add some water. If it gets too wet, add some shredded newspaper or cardboard.

Worms like the dark, so keep a damp old towel or newspaper over the bedding to create an extra roof. This will help to keep flies out as well.

You can put a blanket over the whole system if the weather turns cold.

Always make sure the lid is on to keep pests out and trap moisture in.

# Harvest time

## Worm castings

After about 3–6 months, working tray 1 will be full. Now you can place working tray 2 on top of tray 1, add your food scraps, and the worms will make their way up through the holes into tray 2 to feed. Similarly, when tray 2 is full, simply install tray 3 on top.

The processed material in the working trays is called worm castings, which are like gardener's gold! When you have one or two full working trays, you can harvest this material and it should smell earthy and look like fine compost. Leave the top working tray installed and take out the lower trays. Then sprinkle the castings directly around your garden, trees or potted plants. You can also add water and use it like a liquid fertiliser – just sit back and watch those plants grow!

If you don't have a garden, you can spread the castings around your backyard, use it as a potting mix, or offer it to a neighbour or community garden.

## Worm juice

“Worm juice” is the liquid that might collect in the bottom tray. Turn the tap on and collect the juice in a cup or bucket. To use the juice, dilute it 3 parts water to 1 part worm juice, then use it as a liquid fertiliser on your garden, trees or potted plants.

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# Troubleshooting

## Rotten food and smells

This is probably because you are feeding the worms more food than they can keep up with. Stop feeding them for up to a week, and then slowly increase the amount of food over the next few weeks.

## How long can I leave my worms without food?

If you are going away on holiday, the worms will be ok for about 3–4 weeks, just feed them some extra food before you leave. A good 'slow release' food is lucerne/alfalfa chaff, or pea straw hay. Make sure you flush the collector tray with some water before you go and place a layer of soaked newspaper on top.

## There are lots of fruit/vinegar flies or white worms in my worm farm

This is probably a sign that the worm farm is too acidic. To reduce the acidity, you can add a sprinkle of sawdust, garden soil, or add more bedding materials. Make sure the lid is sealed on the container you keep in your kitchen, and empty it regularly. Seeing a small number of other critters in your worm farm is a sign of a healthy mini-ecosystem.

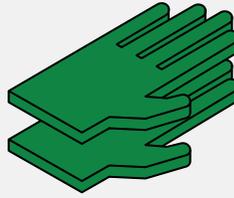
## There is no worm juice

This isn't a problem, as long as the contents of your worm farm are moist enough (it should look and feel damp, but not soggy). Your worm farm should only ever be producing small amounts of worm juice. If cups and cups are coming out, you're putting in too much liquid!

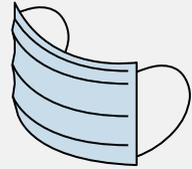
# Health and safety

Compost can contain micro-organisms such as Legionella that on rare occasions can cause serious illness. Please wear a face mask and avoid inhaling vapour if the compost is steaming. Always wear gloves when handling compost and wash your hands afterwards.

Look after your Tumbleweed Worm Café, and it will look after you! Following all the guidelines above will help keep your worm farm healthy and safe.



**gloves**



**face mask**

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## Contact a worm farm expert!

We're here to help you understand and get the hang of this process. Please get in touch if you need some help:



**food.waste@wcc.govt.nz**



Or call **04 499 4444**



For general information about home composting visit **[wellington.govt.nz/foodwaste](http://wellington.govt.nz/foodwaste)**

Created with guidance and input from:



**Para Kai**

**Absolutely Positively  
Wellington City Council**

Me Heke Kī Pōneke