

The dirt on indoor composting

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The Vancouver Landfill (garbage dump), located directly in Burns Bog, is the final destination for garbage from 45% of Metro. Last year alone over 1,250,000 tonnes of garbage were dumped into the Landfill adding another level to the seemingly endless mound.

Composting is an inexpensive and easy way of reducing up to 30% personal household waste.

There are two main types of compost: indoor and outdoor. If you want to learn more about outdoor compost please [click here](#). Indoor composting, also known as vermicomposting, is the perfect solution for apartment living, workplace or classroom settings, or for anyone who doesn't have the space for a backyard system. This method uses worms to break down organic waste. The result: high quality soil. Worried about the smell? It is practically odourless! [Click here](#) for my simple 4 step process.



Photo from
http://www.wormdirtybynature.com/_/rsrc/1233514635253/Home/WormComposter.png

This is a great project for teachers or parents to do with children. Children have a natural curiosity about worms and this is a fun way to introduce them to the concept of composting and nutrient recycling.

Little maintenance is required after the initial setup. Just continue feeding the worms kitchen scraps. They eat almost all fruits, vegetables, tea and even coffee grounds. Do not feed your worms meat, dairy, grease or cooked grains like pasta and rice. Egg shells are great for neutralizing a worm bin that is high in acidic foods (coffee, citrus and tomatoes). For a complete list of foods or trouble shooting you can download a copy of MetroVancouver's Worm Composting Guide [here](#).

When your worms have created enough castings, in other words, the bin is full of worm poop, feed the worms on only one side for a week. The worms will migrate to the side with food, allowing you to harvest from the other side. The castings will look like dark black soil. Rich in nutrients, the castings make an excellent addition to garden or potted plants.

If you have any questions please email into@burnsbog.org or use MetroVancouver's guide to worm composting (<http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/wormcompostbrochure.pdf>).

There are 4 simple elements:

Container

The container houses your worms. Anything from a Rubbermaid container to an old barrel makes a great container. I recommend a Rubbermaid 53 L. The container has a lid and handles; it is light, cheap, easy to drill and fits nicely under my sink.

- If you reuse wood make sure there is no toxic paint or varnish as it will leech into your worm bin.
- A shallow container is best as worms will not go lower than 20-30 cm.
- If your container is covered drill ventilation holes in the upper half.
- You could also drill holes into the bottom of the bin. If you do then you will need a collection bin underneath. If you decide to not put holes into the bottom you will need to make sure the bin stays damp, not wet, by aerating every week or so.
- The container cannot be see-through as light will stress the worms. Do not use an aquarium as your container.

Bedding

Shredded newspaper or white paper makes perfect bedding.

- Thoroughly wet the material. The bedding should be moist but not soaking wet. Make sure there are no pools of water at the bottom.
- Check the moisture content of your bin once a week and add more water or more dry bedding accordingly. Make sure your bedding does not dry out as worms require moisture for respiration.
- Once you get started the moisture from the food should keep the levels balanced by itself.
- Be sure to turn the bedding once a week or so to aerate it.

Sand

Worms require sand or fine gravel to break down their food. Sprinkle a cup of sand into the bin. I raided a cup of sand from a local playground.

Worms

You need to get red wiggler worms as they are fast composters, prolific breeders and will live happily in the worm bin conditions.

- You can get worms from a friend's compost bin, from compost piles or you can call Vancouver Compost at 604-736-2250 to ask where you can buy local worms. You do not need many as they reproduce quickly. You can also order worms online and get them shipped right to your door. I purchased half a pound of worms from a local worm farm for \$20. This is a one-time investment.
- Dump the worms in your bin and they will burry themselves into the bedding.

Happy composting!