

From the Kitchen

Fruit and veggie waste (light citrus, I skip pineapple)
Coffee grounds and filters
Tea bags
Used paper napkins
Pizza boxes, ripped into smaller pieces
Paper bags, either ripped or balled up
The crumbs you sweep off of the counters and floors
Plain cooked pasta
Plain cooked rice
Stale bread
Paper towel rolls
Stale cereal
Used paper plates (as long as they don't have a waxy coating)
Nut shells (except for walnut shells, which can be toxic to plants)
Old herbs and spices
Stale pretzels
Pizza crusts
Cereal boxes (tear them into smaller pieces first)
Wine corks
Old jelly, jam, or preserves
Stale beer and wine
Paper egg cartons
Paper cupcake or muffin cups

From the Bathroom

Used facial tissues
Hair from your hairbrush
Toilet paper rolls
Nail clippings
100% Cotton cotton balls
Cotton swabs made from 100% cotton and cardboard (not plastic) sticks

From the Office

Bills and other documents you've shredded
Envelopes (minus the plastic window)
Phone books (minus covers)
Pencil shavings
Sticky notes

Business cards (as long as they're not glossy)

Receipts

Around the House

Newspapers (shredded or torn into smaller pieces)

Subscription cards from magazines

Leaves trimmed from houseplants

Dead houseplants and their soil

Flowers from floral arrangements

Natural potpourri

Used matches

Party and Holiday Supplies

Wrapping paper rolls

Paper table cloths

Jack o' Lanterns

Those straw bales you used as part of your outdoor fall decor

Natural holiday wreaths

Pet-Related

Fur from the dog or cat brush

Droppings and bedding from your rabbit/gerbil/hamsters, etc.

Newspaper/droppings from the bottom of the bird cage

Feathers

Alfalfa hay or pellets (usually fed to rabbits)

Fish food

Dry dog or cat food

A few helpful worm composting sites and blogs

<http://CastawayCompost.com>

<http://Redwormcomposting.com>

<http://vermicomposters.ning.com>

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/verm/>

<http://compost.css.cornell.edu/worms/basics.html>

<http://www.wormfarmingsecrets.com/>

<http://www.epa.gov/osw/conservation/rrr/composting/vermi.htm>

<http://www.thewormdude.com/category/worm-blog/>

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/homecomposting/worm.html>

<http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/vermicomposting/>

<http://www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html>

<http://jubileevillage.org>

How-to and What-ifs

Add worms to moist to wet bedding. Feed sparingly for the first week or so. Then let the worms lead you. I usually add food when their last feeding is about half gone. If you get smells, fruit flies or mites check moisture and amount of food. It can be too dry, too wet, too much food at once or not enough bedding to cover the food.

Bedding - junk mail, newspapers, office paper, cardboard, phone books, pizza boxes (I know it's cardboard), leaves, straw, hamster/guinea pig bedding.

Food - manures (no human, dog or cat), veggie and fruit waste (stay away from pineapple, light on citrus), tea bags, coffee grounds, coffee filters, crushed eggshells, compost.

Food no-nos - meat, dairy products, grease, human, dog or cat manure.

Other add-ins - paper towels, Kleenex, hair, cotton (worn out clothes), paper towel and toilet paper rolls.

Leave a light on for a few nights to dissuade the worm delinquents from wandering. After that they will stay in their new home as long as it is safe, moist and there is food available. Worms eat microbes and tiny pieces of stuff. Surface area of the food and bedding mixed with moisture and oxygen are the keys to microbe growth. A whole tomato will break down eventually, a tomato smoothee will break down quickly and might get hot (worms won't like) and a chopped up one will break down fairly quickly without the heat. I tend to chop up those things that are easy to chop up. I don't blend. Others freeze, thaw and drain their worm food. This kills fruit fly eggs and really helps speed up the break down. Some worms will be on the lid of your bin or high on the sides. If it is just a handful no worries, if it is 50 - 1000 you have bin issues.

Worms take two to tango and both worms produce cocoons. Cocoons have 2-to-alot of young worms. Breeder worms have the band at about 1/3 down the body. Cocoons will start out as a gold tomato seed size bead and will turn dark brown right before they emerge. Red worms breed early and often. With unlimited space and food in ideal conditions they would double in number every 2 months. However, they will not over-populate their space or food supply.

After 3 to 6 months you will have enough worms and compost to harvest both or either. If you want compost only, you can scrape it out the bottom of the flow-thrus or use burlap over fresh bedding and a light to get the worms out of the compost. If you want worms, you can get or make a worm separator or separate by hand. If you want more bins take one side of your bin (worms and compost) and add it to a new bin. Add additional bedding to both. You could also push all of your bin contents (worms and compost) to one side. Add fresh bedding to the other side and only feed the fresh side. After 2 - 4 weeks, most of the worms will have migrated. Harvest the compost from the old side.

Composting 101 – Keith O'Dell, Castaway Compost

So how do you want to compost: Hot, Cold and/or Worm?

Hot – Get greens, browns, water and air. Mix and repeat. Size should be 3' x 3' x 3' to 6' x 6' x 4'. Compost in 3 to 12 months.

Cold – Get greens, browns, water and air. Mix and wait. Size is whatever you have room for. Compost in 6 to 24 months.

Worm – Get greens, browns, water, air and worms. Mix. Feed greens and cover with browns 4 to 24 times per month based on the worms feeding rate. Compost is produced daily but in small quantities. Usually about a gallon per month per pound of worms.

Greens – fruit, veggies, grass, manures, coffee grinds.

Browns – leaves, cardboard, paper, coffee filters, straw.

Compost bin types – piles, pallets, hardware cloth rings, purchased bins. Cheap to Expensive

Worm bin types – piles, buckets, tubs, purchased bins. Cheap to Expensive

Everything will breakdown eventually. You pay for all of your food but throw a lot of it away. Then you buy fertilizer, potting soil and mulch that you can make better yourself and it will be better for all of us.

You decide how much time, money and effort you want to put into it. How much waste you want to turn into a valuable soil amendment. And whether you want to do it year-round or just when it's nice out. Then start composting.