Composting at home is good for your garden and good for the earth. Approximately 35% of all household garbage in the US is organic waste that can be composted in your backyard. By composting your food scraps you can prevent waste and greenhouse gas emissions, have healthier plants, conserve water and use fewer chemicals in your yard and garden.

Why Compost with Worms?
Worms are natural composting machines. Worm composting, also known as vermicomposting, uses “red wiggler” worms to turn leftover food into a dark, rich soil amendment. Composting with worms doesn’t take up much space and can be done inside or outside. Worm compost is an excellent soil amendment. It can be used directly in the garden, either dug into the soil or used as mulch. The compost can also be mixed with potting soil and used for houseplants and container gardening. If screened down to fine particles, it can be added to potting mixes for seedlings or finely sprinkled on a lawn as a conditioner.

Location
Worms prefer a dark, cool, damp environment. Ideally, your worm bin should be in a moderate temperature environment (between 50 and 75 degrees). A basement, garage, or utility room are all good places for a worm bin. A larger bin may withstand cold outside temperatures, but it is best to insulate the outside of the bin with foam blocks or other insulating materials in the cold winter months.

Helpful Hints
To discourage fruit flies, bury the food scraps under some dry bedding. You may also try putting a layer of plastic on top of the bedding. Bad odor can be the result of several things:

- Make sure you are putting the right type of foods in the bin.
- Check the air holes to make sure they are clear for proper aeration. Fluff up the materials to aerate the bin.
- You may be overfeeding the worms. Stop feeding for a few days and see if the odor stops.

Worms
It is important to get the right type of worms for composting. Only “red wigglers” or “red worms” should be used for composting. Nightcrawlers or other worms dug up from the garden will typically not work.

Easy Bedding Recipe:

- 1 part shredded paper
- 1 part peat moss
- Water

Combine peat moss and paper and soak until very moist. The peat moss will retain a lot of water.
Harvesting Your Compost

As time progresses, you will notice less bedding and more dark, crumbly soil in your bin. This is the time to harvest, when there is mostly compost, and very little bedding or food. There are two good methods for harvesting your compost.

Migration Method

Slow down on feeding your worms for a week. Push all of the contents of the bin to one side of the bin, and add fresh, damp bedding to the other side. When you resume feeding, place food only on the “new” side. Within the next few weeks, the worms will sense the food and migrate, leaving the finished compost on the other side. You can then remove the compost, and fill the empty space with bedding.

Dump, Divide and Sort Method

Dump the contents of your bin on a tarp under a bright light or sunlight. Mound the material into small coneshaped piles and wait 20-30 minutes. The worms will move down into the material, away from the light. Take the fresh compost off the top of the piles, and continue down, until you have mostly worms in each pile. Create new bedding and put the worms back in the bin to continue composting.

Additional Resources

Where To Buy Worms

Local:
Wonder Worman, Bend
www.wonderworman.com, 541-390-7610
Rockton Ranch, Redmond
Toni Stephan and Rocky Bessette, 541-548-0789

State:
Three Tree Farms, Cottage Grove, OR
www.redwiggler.com, 541-942-9033

Helpful Websites

www.wonderworman.com
www.acnewormfarm.com
www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html
www.wormwoman.com
www.howtocompost.org

Books

Worms Eat My Garbage  Mary Applehof
Flower Press, Kalamazoo, MI, 1999

The Worm Book  Loren Nancarrow and Janet Hogan

Recycle with Earthworms: The Red Wiggler Connection
Shelley Grossman and Toby Weitzel, Shields Publications,
Eagle River, WI, 1997