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worm your way into composting

vermiculture

Ready to take your home gardening to the next level? Want to compost but don't have room? Looking for a year round source of fertilizer? Vermiculture, or worm composting, may be the answer for you. By recycling your kitchen scraps you can make them a valuable resource for your garden and potted plants.

Worms produce a product (castings) that is considered an especially good soil amendment and nutrient source, and if sheltered from the cold, can maintain production year-round. The result of the vermicomposting process can be a granular substance with a high moisture holding capacity that slowly releases nutrients and is rich in plant-growth hormones, as well as humus and humic acids. Humus and humic acids are the waste products of microorganisms that are present in vermicompost, but are usually only found in very old, healthy soils.

Various benefits to plants from vermicomposting can range from accelerated plant growth, to the suppression of various pests and diseases, and even increased levels of anti-oxidants in food grown in amended soils.

All you need to get started is:

- A shallow container - 12" deep with a cover.
- Red Wiggler worms (*Eisenia fetida*) which can be found online, at fishing marinas and local sporting good retailers.
- A controlled temperature between 54-84°F.
- Moisture to keep their skin moist, but not so much that they drown.
- Air to breath.
- Food scraps such as, fruit, grains, vegetables, egg shells, coffee grounds, and tea bags. Avoid meat, fish, milk, fats, oils and pet droppings.

Use the following as a guide to make your worm bin:

A wooden or plastic (not clear) container two feet square and one foot deep with a lid will accommodate one pound of worms. Remember, worms like it dark! Provide drainage and aeration by drilling about a dozen 1/8" holes in the bottom and upper sides of the container.

Soak or spray shredded black and white newspaper with water. Squeeze any excess water out. Fluff the shredded newspaper and use to line the bottom of the worm container. Add a couple of handfuls of garden soil, sand, leaf mold or finished compost to the newspaper. This worm bedding should be kept moist.

Finally, add the worms. Feed the worms small amounts at a time, at first. In about three months, the worms will have doubled their population and it will be time to harvest the compost. Worm castings can be used as an ingredient of potting soil (as plant nutrients). It can also be used as a planting additive for trees, vegetables, shrubs and flowers.

For more information on worms and building a worm bin refer to Raising Earthworms Successfully - Texas A&M University web site: fisheries.tamu.edu/files/2013/09/Raising-Earthworms-Successfully.pdf



Have some fun... **Come join us in our Vermiculture Class on April 11th, at 9:30- 11:30.** Learn to compost in a small space and have a year round source of fertilizer. Hope to see you there!

The Master Gardeners of Rockwall County are planning for a Spring 2020 Tour of Gardens. We have seen many enviable gardens in the past. To help you prepare your garden to be worthy of envy, we will publish an article for the next three editions of EnviroSmart pertaining to soil preparation, planting, and enjoying.

A soil test is a great place to start. Soil collection bags and directions are available at your County Extension office. While waiting for your test results, you can conduct a "Hole-Test" to determine soils aeration, drainage, and water holding capacity. Dig a hole 6 to 8 inches in diameter and two feet deep. Let it dry for several days, then fill about half full with water. If water drains quickly, you have excessive drainage. Add organic matter. If it takes between 15-30 minutes, you have adequate drainage and water holding properties. If it takes longer than 30 minutes, you have poor drainage. You should amend with coarse textured soil amendments like mulch or

expanded shale. When adding expanded shale, put a three inch layer on top of the area. Till it in 6 to 8 inches deep. Adding expanded shale should be a one time amendment. However, adding mulch should be done on an annual basis.

It is hard to beat adding additional compost to your garden. If soil in your garden is heavy clay, adding composted organic matter will help by allowing better root development, drainage and aeration. In sandy soil, the wise gardener will find that a liberal amount of compost will increase the ability of the soil to hold water and nutrients. The final soil mix should ideally contain one-third compost. This is best done by spreading a 2 to 4 inch layer of compost and till to a depth of 6 to 10 inches.

More details on soil preparation can be found at: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/files/2013/09/EHT-076.pdf>



spring lawn maintenance

a healthy lawn discourages weeds

- **Scalping the lawn** can be beneficial in early spring, just prior to lawn green-up. Lower your mower blade to about 1" cutting height and bag the clippings. Scalping will help control some winter annual broadleaf weeds and remove some thatch accumulation. TAKE CAUTION to not overdo scalping on lawns with heavy thatch — especially on St. Augustine grass. If the runners are located in the upper portion of the thatch, scalping may cause damage to these vital plant parts.
- **Apply pre-emergent weed killer** to stop the germination of crabgrass, and other warm season grassy weeds and broadleaf weeds that come back from seeds. Dimension and Halts are commonly used to control grass weeds. Balan and Gallery are commonly used to control broadleaf weeds. Pre-emergents do not help with perennial weeds that come back from root systems. Timing is critical. For Rockwall County, the application should be around early March. Remember, if you can see the weed growing, it is too late.
- **Apply fertilizer** after the second or third mowing in spring. There is usually enough residual nitrogen in the soil to maintain grass through the first few mowings. A fertilizer high in nitrogen with low or no phosphorus and potassium content is recommended. Bermuda grass lawns require additional applications of nitrogen every 45 to 60 days. For St. Augustine grasses, apply nitrogen every 8 to 10 weeks. For St. Augustine growing in heavy shade, fertilizer may only be required in spring and fall.

EnviroSmart

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harvesting

when to pick your veggies

You may know the best time of year to plant your favorite vegetables but do you know the best time to harvest? Biggest is not always the best. Harvesting too late, when vegetables are oversized, can result in poor quality and loss of flavor as sugars are converted into starches. So how do you know when to harvest if you can't judge solely by size and color?

The first step is to keep a record of the cultivars and dates when they were planted. Information for the 'days to harvest' can be found on the back of your seed packet. This is a general guideline for determining the number of days needed, after planting seeds or transplants, for a plant to reach maturity and be ready for harvest. Many cultural factors, including weather and soil temperatures can affect the number of days.

Check out the 'Successful Vegetable Gardening' tab for planting guides, including information on harvesting, handling and storing vegetables on the RCMG website: rockmga.org

Look for information on harvesting tomatoes in our summer issue!

A few harvesting tips:

Broccoli harvest when flower heads are fully developed but before flower buds show yellow. Cut 6 to 7 inches below the flower heads. 60-80 days to harvest.

Onion the ideal onion bulb is 2 to 4 inches in diameter. Pull when the tops fall over. 80-120 days to harvest.

Peas (snow, sugar snap, English) harvest when peas are plump and pod is full size. 60-70 days to harvest.



spring gardens

growing vegetables

March

The first half of the month, plant swiss chard, collards, leaf lettuce, radish, spinach and turnips. The last hard freeze should occur around the third week of March. Delay planting vulnerable vegetables until the hard freeze has passed. The second half of the month, plant beans, cantaloupe, sweet corn, cucumbers, mustard, summer and winter squash, watermelon and tomato (transplants).

April

The first half of the month, plant okra, Southern peas, pepper, sweet potatoes, pumpkin and eggplant (transplants). The second half of the month, plant pepper (transplants).

May

Continue planting sweet potatoes in the first half of the month. Fertilize the garden monthly with an all-nitrogen fertilizer. Spread mulch around the plants, and carefully weed the garden, putting the weeds in the compost bin.

Lawn recovery after winter...

Green-up and recovery of bermudagrass begins when nighttime temperatures remain above 60°F for several days in the spring and soil temperatures reach 65°F at the 4-inch depth. Temperature, shade, moisture, competition with weeds and cool season grasses are the major environmental factors affecting bermudagrass recovery in the spring. Low temperature kill of bermudagrass occurs somewhere below 10°F and can affect spring recovery.

Pokey . . . and putting Wormy to bed



upcoming events

come to a class!

April 11 - Vermiculture Class

Learn to compost with worms (vermicomposting) in a small space and discover the benefits of having this year round source of fertilizer for your plants and vegetable gardens. Class will be held from 9:30-11:30 at the Rockwall County Extension Office, 915 Whitmore, Suite B, Rockwall, TX 75087. Call 972-204-7660 or email rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu for a registration form. Cost is \$15.

A drawing will be held at the class and one lucky attendee will go home with a worm bin of their own!

Are you interested in becoming a Master Gardener?

12 week series of classes will be offered this Fall, 2019. Applications will be available soon.

Call 972-204-7660 or email rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu to request one.

Wednesday Gardening Hot Line: "Ask a Master Gardener!" Volunteers will be answering calls and emails every Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. Call (972) 204-7660 or email us at:

rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu.

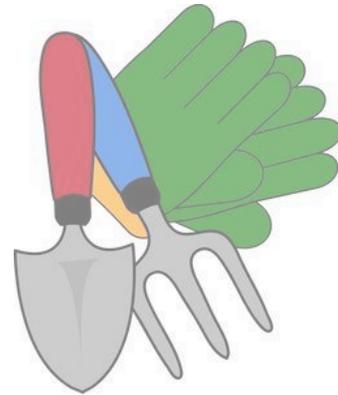
Check out our **Rockwall County Master Gardener** page on Facebook!

For more information log on to :

www.rockmga.org

aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu

agrilifebookstore.org



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