

Wiggle your way into worm composting

By Kym Pokorny
Correspondent

CORVALLIS – Impressed by compost’s contribution to the soil, gardeners conferred on it the nickname “black gold.” Even more beneficial worm castings could take the title “black diamonds.”

Just ask true believer Larry Steele, an Oregon State University Extension Service master gardener who commends the rich nutrition of red-worm manure, also known as castings.

“I started with regular compost,” said Steele, who teaches Extension-sponsored classes on worm composting, or vermicomposting. “But then I took a session in master gardener training and the instructor talked about how good worm castings are and how easy it is to make.”

Right away he learned the most important lesson in vermicomposting: Don’t use the big worms already wiggling around in the soil. These big night crawlers won’t hang around.

Instead, keep your worm farm working with red worms, also called red wigglers or tiger worms. Build or buy the worms a box or bin, feed them food scraps and they’ll reward you by sticking around and producing a rich compost that not only adds nutrients to the soil, but also improves its structure.

“If you build a comfortable place for them to live and keep feeding them, they’ll never go away,” said Steele, who keeps a worm bin at home.

Making a comfortable place for the worms is an easy enough proposition. Plenty of worm bins are on the market, but building one takes only six pieces of plywood, a hammer and some nails. Make a box by attaching sides and bottom, but leave the top board loose so you can open and close the bin. Add hinges if you’re feeling ambitious. Don’t forget to drill holes in the sides of the box to give the inhabitants air; they’ll die without it.

The size of the box depends on the amount of

food waste you add during a week. A good rule of thumb is a square foot of box per pound of waste a week, according to Steele. A 2-by-4-foot box with a 12- to 16-inch depth is a good place to start.

Plastic bins can be used, also, but because of their nonporous nature you’ll need two bins stacked on top of each other with spacers (bricks would work) between them. In this case, drill holes in the bottom of the first bin so liquid resulting from the vermicomposting process can drip down. The liquid can be mixed with water and applied around plants.

Wooden boxes can be set on bricks with a tray underneath to catch liquid, but in Steele’s experience it hasn’t been necessary.

“Most of the excess moisture gets absorbed into the wood or just doesn’t materialize as condensation because the wood is a better insulator and warmer surface,” he said. “And more moisture just escapes because wood breathes and plastic doesn’t.”

For bedding, newsprint is a cheap and easy option, but only use the black-and-white sections. Tear it into long strips, soak it in water and squeeze until it’s about as moist as a damp sponge. Fluff it up and then fill the bottom quarter of the box. Add worms and cover them with a layer two to three times as thick as the bottom layer. Lay down more bedding when it is reduced by half, about every month or two depending on the size of the bin and how much food is provided.

Steele recommends about 1,000 worms for that size box, but even a quarter of that amount will work.

“They have a marvelous capacity to reproduce,” he said. “Eight mature worms can result in 1,500 offspring in six months.”

Red worms are available at places that sell fish bait and online from outfits that supply vermicomposting equipment. Or, scoop out a handful from a friend’s bin for free.



PHOTO BY SUSANA SECRETARIAT

SISTERS OUTLAWS EVENTS CALENDAR

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Free Mouthguards for Sisters Student Athletes Call for appointment Dr. Thomas R. Riechen 541-549-0109 364 W. Alton Ave. www.SistersOutlaws.com	2 Twilight Soccer Team Ends Team checks back home	3 Winter Sports Registration Begins	4 Empty Bowls A Benefit for Family Against Network (FAN) SBS Comments 6 p.m. Soccer OSAA State 1st Round. TBD	5 Volleyball Quarterfinals Finals at Forest Grove High School. TBD	6 Soccer OSAA State Quarter- finals. TBD	7 Volleyball Quarterfinals- Finals at Forest Grove High School. TBD
8 HAPPY WOK ASIAN FOOD 352 E. Hood Ave. Open 12-2 p.m. (Just Monday) 541-549-0109 Join us for our 2015 event	9 Soccer OSAA State Semifinals. TBD	10 Volleyball No School	11 Winter Sports Registration 5:30-7:30 p.m. SBS Comments Winter Sports Mandatory Parent Meeting SBS Comments 7:30-9:30 p.m.	12 Soccer OSAA State Finals. TBD	13 Soccer OSAA State Finals. TBD	14 Volleyball Quarterfinals- Finals at Forest Grove High School. TBD
15 First day Winter Sports Practice	16 First day Winter Sports Practice	17 First day Winter Sports Practice	18 First day Winter Sports Practice	19 First day Winter Sports Practice	20 First day Winter Sports Practice	21 First day Winter Sports Practice
22 Thanksgiving Break No School	23 Thanksgiving Break No School	24 Thanksgiving Break No School	25 Thanksgiving Break No School	26 Thanksgiving Break No School	27 Thanksgiving Break No School	28 Thanksgiving Break No School
29 Second Thanksgiving Break	30 Second Thanksgiving Break					
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