

What You Need to Know About...

Easy Worm Mix



By Bentley “Compost Guy” Christie

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INTRODUCTION

The “Problem”

Composting worms are almost always sold by the “pound” or by larger counts. The result is a unnaturally high density of worms being packed up with a relatively small amount of (usually lifeless) bedding material, such as peat moss.

Not exactly an ideal situation for the worms.

By the time they reach the customer (assuming they survive the trip), it's almost inevitable there will be some mortalities – and, bare minimum, the worms are going to be stressed and very often restless in their new environment.



Of course, because the customer is receiving so many worms, they will also need to shell out quite a lot of money for them (typically \$45-\$60/lb PLUS shipping & tax).

Part of the problem is that there's a myth (almost certainly started, and nurtured by worm suppliers) suggesting that you actually **NEED** a pound of worms to start up a home worm bin.

This is simply not true.

This goes hand-in-hand with the other widely-spread myth that worms will eat their weight in waste materials every day. Yes, there are situations where that is possible (even *greater* feeding rates than that!), but rest assured, 99.9% of the time it's not something the average home vermicomposter can realistically expect – especially when just starting out with a brand new system!

My Accidental Discovery

Fairly early on in my own vermicomposting journey - like most people - I assumed that you **DID** need “pounds” (or at least 1 lb anyway) of worms in order to start up a typical worm bin. What I found strange, though, was that having all these worms didn't necessarily help me hit the ground running. More often than not, it seemed like the worms actually died back and/or tried to escape from the bin before they showed any

real interest in the food scraps I offered them.

But here's the interesting thing...

I started to notice a *pattern*.

Any time I set up a brand new system with plenty of bedding materials, a smaller amount of food scraps, and a lot of worm-rich material taken from an existing worm bin, the system absolutely thrived. And right from the start, too!

The worm population would grow very quickly. This was partially due to all the countless baby worms and cocoons I didn't even realize had been in the worm mix. But it was also simply a case of the worms doing what they do best – rapidly expanding in number to take advantage of a high quality, organic-waste-rich environment.

It's in their very nature.

Red Worms (and other composting species) are “epigeic” earthworms, meaning they live near the soil surface – often above, in fact - in deposits of rich organic matter (eg. an old horse manure heap or compost pile). This means they are much more exposed to the elements, and their habitat can deteriorate much more rapidly than that of a deep-burrowing soil worm. So they need to be a lot more tolerant of a variety of environmental conditions, and they need to be able to grow and reproduce very quickly, in order to help ensure the future success of their population.

When you put these basic principles to work in a home system, “magic” happens!

Introducing ... “Easy Worm Mix”

Over the years, since starting my own worm composting business, I have been experimenting with various versions of “composting worm mix”. The main idea has always been the same – that is, to offer customers an alternative to “pounds” or larger “counts” of worms, that not only costs less, but that can actually make it a lot easier to set up a healthy, thriving, *effective* vermicomposting system.

More recently, I've streamlined things even further by offering a single Red Worm mix, known as “Easy Worm Mix”. Originally, this was worm-rich material taken from thriving worm beds and added directly to a large, breathable bag. The volume was roughly the same as my “3 Bags of Red Worm Mix” from previous years, but the price was lower

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since the material is not concentrated as much before being packed.

***** Important Spring 2018 Update *****

My product offerings have continued to evolve over time in an effort to provide more value for customers while helping me to streamline the business. In Spring of 2018 I decided to switch back to the smaller breathable bags and to offer customers actual counts of worms. Each smaller bag of Easy Worm Mix will contain at least 250 Red Worms – along with the same rich habitat material often containing even more worms, cocoons, and beneficial composting organisms.

As much as I believe in, and stand by, the original Easy Worm Mix concept (and I may even switch back at some point), the one potential weakness of the approach is the lack of standardization. Customers were guaranteed to get more than enough worms to get a new worm bin started – but the fact of the matter is this number could (and did) vary somewhat from order to order, especially at different times of year etc.

With the new counts, customers can rest easy knowing they are getting *at least* 250 Red Worms in each of the smaller bags, along with the same fantastic habitat material that will help them kickstart their vermicomposting efforts!

Advantages of Easy Worm Mix

Less Expensive – A pound of Red Worms shipped in Canada typically costs between \$75 and \$90 PLUS TAX, if not more – and who knows if you will even receive the actual quantity you paid for. Two bags of the new Easy Worm Mix costs \$60-\$70 (Tax and Shipping Included), depending on your location (with some exceptions, in very remote locations). And our worms come with beneficial-microbe-loaded, rich habitat material.

When you consider that the average Canada Post shipping cost for a relatively small box (31.5 cm x 25 cm x 24 cm) typically ranges between \$17 and \$33, you quickly see how inexpensive the mix really is. Included in the price is lifetime support, and a range of educational resources to help you get the most out of your vermicomposting efforts.

“Ready For Action” – You're not going to receive a gob of stressed-out (some dead) worms, more interested in escaping than processing food scraps. You receive a healthy all-in-one mix that's primed and ready for a population explosion (assuming you follow the basic “rules” of vermicomposting).

Microbe-Loaded – Often, one of the major problems with a brand new vermicomposting system is that it's basically a sterile environment. Since Easy Mix comes with loads of beneficial-microbe-rich worm bed habitat material, the worms are going to feel right at home, and the decomposition process in the system will get the kick-start it needs!

Harvest Vermicompost Sooner – This may seem counter-intuitive, given the fact that there is a small worm biomass in comparison to “pounds of worms”, but you'll likely get to the point of harvesting your first batch of vermicompost more quickly! The rich habitat material (in the mix) is often quite close to being good quality vermicompost when it gets added. So not only do you help accelerate the conversion of waste materials into new vermicompost, but the material itself reaches the point of being harvest-ready very quickly.

Just Plain “Easy” – The name isn't hype, or some cheap marketing ploy. My aim is to offer customers a *truly* EASY way to start up a worm bin. Simply mix plenty of moistened bedding with some finely chopped up (ideally frozen-then-thawed) food wastes, then add your 2 bags of Easy Mix, cover with more bedding, and close up the bin. That's it.

On that note, let's now look at the step-by-step process of setting up a basic tub system using Easy Worm Mix (I'll discuss some of the differences with stacking systems and Worm Inns as well)...

Getting Started

There is no SET-IN-STONE, *mandatory* way you must use Easy Worm Mix. I recommend focusing more on the main ideas/principles outlined below, than on the exact steps taken and specific details I've included.

For this particular example, I am using a Rubbermaid “Roughneck Tote” that's about 9 inches deep and has a volume of 50-60 litres. The overall approach here, again, is to mix LOTS of moistened bedding, with SOME food waste, along with your Easy Worm Mix.

STEP #1 - Start by filling the tub 1/2 to 3/4 full of moistened bedding. Normally I recommend avoiding pooling of liquid in the bottom of a new system, but since the Easy Mix is highly absorbent it's not a big deal if your bedding ends up a bit over-saturated with moisture.



This will be more ideal than a bin that's too dry (so DO make sure the bedding is AT LEAST “wrung out sponge” moist). My favourite “non living”* bedding material is likely shredded corrugated cardboard, but shredded egg carton (similar to “drink tray”) cardboard or toilet paper roll cardboard are great too. Shredded newsprint also works well – and is likely the easiest/fastest option!

*The reason I use the “non living” distinction is because there is another group of fantastic materials I refer to as “living materials” (some of which can serve as the “ultimate” worm habitat materials). If you want to learn more, be sure to check out my [“Living Material” Report](#).

I prefer absorbent, BULKY bedding (vs something like coconut coir, for example) because it helps with air flow. This is especially important in enclosed, plastic bins.

STEP #2- Next, add and mix in some well-optimized food wastes. For best results, I recommend chopping the wastes up as much as possible, then freezing-thawing them. This exposes a lot more surface area for microbial attack, and greatly assists with the physical (structural) break down of the wastes in general. The freezing can also help to prevent the transfer of viable fruit fly eggs into your system (they can sometimes be found in the peels on ripe fruit – especially those shipped from warmer locations).



NOTE: Although the Easy Mix provides the worms with plenty of protective habitat material, it is still important to make sure you are adding at least twice as much bedding as food during this set up stage. A ratio of 3:1 or 4:1 (bedding:food by volume) would be even better. Also make sure that the wastes you add are NOT foul smelling. If you have allowed the materials to age for a period of time without sufficient air flow they can become anaerobic – and may contain compounds that are harmful for the worms. If this does happen, simply mix those materials with plenty of bulky dry bedding (and maybe a little of the Easy Mix habitat material) and leave them to sit until the smell goes away (they can be used at this point), or simply add them to an outdoor composter/heap.

STEP #3- Now it's time to add our Easy Worm Mix. No need to get too fancy here. Simply dump the contents of the bags into the bin, and gently mix it in with the bedding and food. A gloved hand or small hand rake should work well. Try to get it as evenly-distributed as you can.



STEP #4 - Lastly, I recommend adding a fairly thick layer of bedding on top of the composting zone, before putting on the lid (assuming you plan to use a lid).



NOTE: I've found that a smaller number of large air holes in lid and sides of a bin tends to be much better for air flow than many small, drilled holes.



So Now What?!

Now it's time to leave the system alone, for at least 5-7 days. This may require some serious patience on your part – especially if you are very excited about your new vermicomposting adventure – but I promise it will be worth the wait!

You are more than welcome to check on the bin during this time, but resist the urge to add more food materials. I'd wager to say that 90% (if not more) off all new-vermicomposter issues are linked to overfeeding. Whether it results from the myth about worms eating their own weight in waste per day, or the misguided idea that worms are pets that need to get “fed” daily, new vermicomposters, on average, just seem to have difficulty adopting a mellow approach!

What's funny is that you could probably leave a bin (set up as described above) to sit for months on end without harming the worms. Once the food materials are gone, they'll simply start munching on all the bedding. So definitely don't worry about them “starving to death”.

After a week or so, you should be totally fine to start adding more food – but again, I highly recommend taking a very laid back approach with the feeding schedule. Monitor your food deposits to see how the worms are doing – if they seem to be consuming most of it, you can add more. If they are taking their time, ease back. It's that simple.

If you want to be over-the-top with something, become an optimization junkie! You'll be amazed by how much of a difference it can make when you make the effort to help the

worms (and microbes) do their job. The irony is that you'll likely find yourself needing to feed more often as a result!

A Word Or Two About Other Systems

Obviously not everyone will be setting up a basic plastic tub worm bin, so it's important to include some info about other types of systems.

Stacking Bins – These are a very popular choice among new vermicomposters. The “problem” is that the first tray (what you start with) does not offer much room, so the two bags of Easy Worm Mix will likely take up a fair amount of the total volume. This is fine – just line the bottom of the tray with some sheets of newsprint then gently mix the bags of EWM with plenty of bedding and a smaller amount of food waste.

You might even want to use one of the bags for the stacking system, while using the other bag to set up a separate tub system. Composting worms tend to do really well when given more room to spread out in (along with quality habitat and food).



Urban Worm Bags – These are VERY well suited for Easy Worm Mix. Probably even more so than plastic tubs in fact. Apart from setting up a “false bottom” (in the UWB), the set up process will be very similar to what I described earlier. I recommend using 2-4 bags of Easy Worm Mix for best results in a system of this size – but you can absolutely start one up with even a single bag of EWM. You just need to be a bit more patient, that's all. You can learn more about Urban Worm Bags >>[HERE](#)<<.

Larger Bins/Beds – The same basic set-up idea applies to larger systems as well. Make sure you add LOTS of moist bedding + food + Easy Worm Mix. **The only major caution I will offer is to be very careful about over-heating.** If you set up a large bin the same way as I described for the plastic tub – i.e. 1/2 to 3/4 full of bedding, and then 1/4-1/2 as much food, plus the worm mix – the contents of the bin may end up getting too warm for your worms. My suggestion would be to set up the bin ahead of time, and then to only add the worm mix once the temps stay consistently down below 30 C (a long-stemmed compost thermometer is a very handy tool for monitoring temps in larger systems). How many bags you use will depend on the size of the bin/bed – but as always, the key to remember is that you can start with pretty well any quantity of Red Worms. They are more than happy to breed like crazy if you provide them with a high quality environment!

Worm Bin Organisms

Aside from plenty of Red Worms and plenty of microbes, Easy Worm Mix also contains lots of other compost ecosystem organisms. This can be a source of concern for some people (understandable, especially if you are fairly new to vermicomposting). Rest assured, most of the creatures you will encounter in your bin are harmless (for your worms that is – NONE of them are harmful for humans! lol).

To learn more about common worm bin critters, I highly recommend you check out this video I created:

<http://www.wormcomposting.ca/vermicomposting/composting-worm-mix-critters/>

A Few Caveats Before Signing Off

I'm definitely a “worm mix” proponent - in case you hadn't guessed (lol) - but I'll be the first to admit that Easy Worm Mix isn't necessarily the “perfect” product for every customer and every situation. In general, it's also important to point out that I'm NOT trying to convince you that ordering worms by the pound or larger counts is “BAD”

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(would be pretty hypocritical of me, since I actually sell worms by the pound - via drop-shippers - to U.S. customers). I'm simply offering an effective alternative.

Easy Worm Mix is well suited for those who are setting up brand new home-scale worm composting systems – especially those who don't mind being a little more patient and laid back.

Easy Worm Mix *might* NOT be ideal if:

- You are a worm farming pro setting up a large-scale professional system and need results “yesterday” (but could work great if you don't mind taking your time).
- You are after good “bait-sized” fishing worms (although, if you are happy with Red Wigglers for fishing in general, there are definitely ways to boost their size – just realize that most of the worms in the mix will likely be quite small).

On a somewhat related note – if you happen to be interested in worms as live food organisms (for fish, birds, amphibians etc), the Easy Worm Mix could be an excellent choice (as long as you don't need huge worms) – and you may even end up with a variety of other critters you can also use as live food (eg. springtails, isopods, white worms).

Our family has a pet toad, and he has certainly benefited from our healthy Red Worm populations, along with various other critters that live with the worms.



QUESTIONS?

Be sure to check out the **Easy Worm Mix FAQ:**

<http://www.wormcomposting.ca/vermicomposting/easy-worm-mix-faq/>

Also, don't hesitate to drop me a line any time:

<http://www.wormcomposting.ca/contact/>

Ready To Order Your Easy Worm Mix?

<http://www.wormcomposting.ca/composting-worms/shipped-order-pricing/>

Here Are Some Blog Posts That May Be of Interest

NOTE: Please keep in mind that these were written when I was selling the much larger, single bag of Easy Worm Mix.

[NEW – Easy Worm Mix!](#)

[Easy Worm Mix Bin Update](#)

[Straw Bale Gardening with Easy Worm Mix?](#)

[Feeding My Easy Worm Mix System](#)

[Splitting The Easy Worm Mix Test Bin](#)

[Gardening with Composting Worms](#)

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