

Free, Easy, Plentiful Live Bait for Fishing

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Attention fishermen! There is a super easy way to quickly get all of the worms you will need to fish for free! Even better, zero time is squandered digging for worms before angling, which cuts into fishing time and illegally damages natural areas when done on parkland. What's the secret? Start a compost bin that benefits earthworms!

There are many different approaches to create a compost pile that earthworms will love. The reference section features additional strategies. Here are some simple guidelines for starters:

- Find a cool, shaded spot on your property to setup that is free from chemicals such as lawn treatments or pesticide applications; organic yards are all the better. Traditional composting gets hot from microbial activity. Sunshine further boosts the temperatures. This baking kills weed seeds and encourages fast decomposition but also is bad news for worms.
- Get some sort of a container, such as a 20-30-gallon plastic trash bin or make a bale out of wire fencing. Wider openings make access easier. Whatever is used, be sure that it is free of chemical residues. When using plastic containers, drill 3/16-inch holes around the walls and lid for air circulation and water drainage; some designs collect this liquid to fertilize plants. Larger holes can be drilled on the bottom (some folks even cut the floor clear off) for better drainage and to encourage worm access.
- Make sure the container or wire bale sits level and secure to the ground.
- Add compostable material consisting of green vegetation and brown carbon sources.
 - Good items include fresh grass clippings, apple cores, fruit skins, old lettuce, banana peels, coffee grounds, mushroom stems, mulched leaves, and shredded newspaper.
 - Citrus and onions are compostable but worms avoid eating them.
 - Exclude any meat, bones, pet waste, oil, dairy products, fireplace or barbecue ash or briquettes, wood chunks, plastic junk (including fruit labels), or cooked foods from the bin.
 - Egg shells are fine to add to the compost but they do nothing for worms. Think of eggshells as calcium rocks that take a long time to dissolve.



Figure 1. These earthworms thrive in a 45-gallon (7-cubic-foot) tumbling compost bin. An advantage to tumbling bins over traditional compost mounds is easy access to the worms—simply turn it to get more worms. As the bin rotates, it mixes and aerates the compost. It cannot be too large and heavy or turning will be difficult.

Worm Grunting

Worm grunting is another efficient way to harvest earthworms. It involves generating vibrations in the soil that mimic worm predators; the worms feel the trembles and escape to the surface. The key to success is driving the stake several inches into the ground and getting good vibrations with the rasping stick so that the immediate ground quivers, too. Further worm grunting info and demos are at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ILoGcSxCAY>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9f_v2Difcs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0YjFT8F7RU>

- Mix in some topsoil from the yard. Any worms found can be included, but the worms nearby will be attracted to and eat any vegetation as it starts rotting; their eating eliminates putrid odors. This method is the best way to populate the compost pile with earthworms as some species cannot survive in a compost setting and others, such as the Alabama jumper (*Amyntas* species, which is actually Asian), is extremely invasive—even to the point of damaging garden plants.
- Keep the compost bin moist without soaking it. Tilling the bin helps oxygenate the compost, but can release mold spores, so consider wearing a dust mask.
- After a few weeks, churn the compost and check the worm content. Waiting longer means more worms. Do not slice the worms in half unless they are immediately destined for the hook—instead of doubling the population (a myth), cutting can end up killing them.



Figure 2. Digging, tearing into the environment, and disrupting topsoil ecology is an amateur practice that wastes time from fishing, makes a mess, and is illegal in parks.

Keep adding compostable material to the earthworm bin. Sprinkle excess, fully decomposed product around the yard. Some folks prefer having two bins going at one time so one bin receives fresh material while the other finishes and will be emptied in the yard soon. Mammals, such as raccoons and rats, tend to ignore compost piles provided there are no meats, fats, or cooked foods present. Tiny fruit flies and beetles might like the compost, but are harmless and the latter's grubs could also become bait.

There it is—simple and easy! As part of cleaning up the site after fishing, return any unused worms to the compost bin for next time. Cultivating earthworms can be refined even further, such as adding fruit fly countermeasures, setting up a self-contained system, and creating vermiculture for indoor operations.

For more earthworm information:

Invasive worms:

- http://www.waldeneffect.org/blog/Problems_caused_by_invasive_earthworms/
- <https://extension.psu.edu/look-out-for-jumping-earthworms>
- <https://www.audubon.org/news/invasive-jumping-worms-are-now-tearing-through-mid-western-forests>
- https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2020/01/jumping-worms-are-taking-over-north-american-forests/605257/?fbclid=IwAR3NjQcWJepjBeUGIb_GyQSPM8ekCZQuwo4NQWQdR2gqWKYBuIY5IVzSh7A

Worm farm designs:

- <https://dengarden.com/gardening/Starting-a-Worm-Farm>
- <http://www.earthwiseharmony.com/GARDENS/EH-Home-Made-Worm-Farms-How-to-Build-Your-Own-Worm-Farm.html>
- <https://growwherever.com/how-to-make-a-worm-farm/>
- <https://www.worm-composting-help.com/Indoor-worm-farm.html>
- <https://www.wormfarmingrevealed.com/diywormbin.html>
- <https://modernfarmer.com/2013/05/how-to-build-a-worm-farm/>

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