Worms at Work

Time: 1 hour for set-up, 15-45 minutes on an occasional basis.

Materials Needed:
- Large plastic bin (about 8 to 16 inches deep) with holes in the bottom for aeration
- Tray for underneath the bin
- Two bricks or other large sturdy objects
- 9 to 14 pounds of newspaper
- One bag of potting soil
- 1 pound of red worms
- Food scraps (such as bread, vegetables, fruits, eggshells, grains, coffee grounds, tea bags)
  Do NOT include meat, bones, mayonnaise, fish, peanut butter, candy, or nonfood items
- Tarp or drop cloth
- Bucket or other carrying container
- Household gloves (optional)

Procedures:
- Place bin on top of two bricks and put tray under bin.
- Tear each sheet of newspaper lengthwise into strips that are 1 to 3 inches wide and place half of the pile in the bin.
- Multiply the number of pounds of newspaper by 3 to determine the total amount of water needed (a pint of water weighs a pound, and a gallon of water weighs 8 pounds). Then add half of the water to the bin with newspapers.
- Sprinkle two handfuls of soil and the rest of the newspaper and water. Mix the contents well and distribute evenly in the bin.
- Gently place the worms on top of the bedding, spreading them evenly. Keep the bin uncovered so you can see the worms moving down into the bedding to avoid light.
- Record all activities surrounding the worm bin, including the date the bin was set up, the number of worms (or pounds of worms) added to the bin, and the number of people contributing food scraps.
- Food can be added daily, weekly, or monthly. Be sure to not overload the system and bury food relatively evenly.
- Place a sheet of newspaper over the top of the bin to prevent flies from circulating near the area. Store the bin in a cool place out of direct sunlight, and keep the lid tightly shut.
- Check the bin frequently as food scraps are added to see the changes that occur. Record these observations. After a period of 3 to 6 months, depending on the size of the container, most of the food and bedding will be transformed into worm castings.

Adapted from the Environmental Protection Agency’s “The Quest for Less, Chapter 2.3: Composting”