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Recycling-with worms!

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Do you recycle everything that you can? Don't like to use a disposal because it uses so much water? Hate even more the idea of adding to the landfills? What about kitchen waste? You've tried to compost it but had problems with four-legged pests getting into the compost pile and making a mess.

The Master Gardeners of El Dorado County have the perfect solution: get into the habit of recycling your kitchen waste with worms. It is easy to do, doesn't take much time or space, and gives so much back to your garden with nutrient rich compost.

The worms used in *vermicomposting* (the official term for using specific types of worms to compost) are not the typical worm you see when digging in your garden or the ones you see after a rain. While those types of worms do their own type of recycling, they don't work in the environment needed for vermicomposting. What you need for the purpose of turning kitchen waste into usable, organic, rich vermicompost are collectively known as red wigglers (sometimes referred to as red worms) or red earthworms. If you are botanically inclined, the red wigglers actually are *eisenia fetida* and the red earthworms are *Lumbricus rubellus*.

Now that we have gotten the "science" out of the way and you are ready to consider vermicomposting, you will need two things in addition to kitchen waste. The first is to provide the proper environment for the worms to do their magic. A worm bin is needed, and they come in many forms. A bin can be made of wood, plastic or metal. A common plastic bin is made using either 10 or 14 gallons with lid. The size you want will depend on how many people are producing kitchen waste and the space you have to house the bin. Apartment dwellers can just as easily do worm composting as can homeowners. The second requirement is the "bedding" for the worms. The material for the bedding can be a combination of shredded, non-shiny paper and dried leaves or it can also be made with cardboard that has been cut up combined with leaves and/or shredded paper. The bedding needs to be damp but not wet; typically it needs to be the

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consistency of a damp sponge. Add the bedding to the bin so that it takes up no more than two-thirds of the bin.

Now for the food: There are some basic dos and don'ts. *Don't add:* meat, bones, oils (salad dressings included), dairy products, excess citrus to your worms. *Do Add:* just about anything else that is considered kitchen waste, including a few things that you wouldn't normally think about. Tea bags, bread, egg shells, and coffee grounds and filters are all welcomed by the composters in the worm bin.

The bin, the bedding, and the food are the foundation for vermicomposting. The next steps will be covered in a subsequent article by the Master Gardeners of El Dorado County. You may also refer to the presentation used for the 2016 class <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/files/242274.pdf>. Watch for the next class which will likely be held in early 2017. Also, we have exhibits at all of our plant sales. Make a note of the next plant sale date: September 24, 2016 at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville.

Join Master Gardener Shilo Nielsen this Saturday, July 9th for a free class Working with Soils. Healthy soil means healthy plants. Come find out what your soil needs to keep your plants healthy and growing strong and why it is so important to our overall environmental health. Feed the soil, and the plants take care of themselves! Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville.

Also "Saturdays with Barry" happens from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. this Saturday at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden; Master Gardener Barry Wold will be in the Vegetable Garden to demonstrate the latest gardening techniques, pest control measures, and to answer all your gardening questions.

Master Gardeners will offer a class for children on raising worms next Wednesday, July 13th from 9:00 a.m. to noon at Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park. Kids will learn the benefits of worms, and how to build a worm bin and care for worms. There is a materials fee for this class. For information or to register for this class go to <http://ucanr.edu/mgkidsclass-raising-worms>.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmer's Markets, and Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.