



# Bellarine Worms

## FAQs

### **Is my worm farm supposed to smell bad?**

A well managed worm farm should smell pleasantly earthy. If your farm has a bad smell, remove any rotting food and make sure you're not overfeeding your worms. You can also gently aerate your bedding with a garden fork and add moistened newspaper to help counter the effects of overfeeding.

Remember also that your worms like moisture - if you don't get a few drops when you squeeze a handful of bedding, then spray with a little water. You can also use a sprinkling of dolomite or garden lime to re-establish your worm farm's pH - these are available from your local garden and hardware suppliers.

### **What happens when I go away on holiday?**

Worms can live for up to 4 weeks without fresh food. Put damp newspaper in the worm farm and leave in a cool location. Empty the 'worm juice' before you go and leave the tap open with a container underneath it to collect the liquid.

### **Why are there flies in my worm farm?**

A well-managed worm farm shouldn't attract flies as they have difficulty breeding where food is being quickly consumed by worms. If flies become an annoyance, reduce how much you feed your farm or try covering it with a hessian sack or shade cloth.

### **How do I stop pests invading my worm farm?**

Insects like slaters, beetles, springtales and mites are all a part of the natural decomposition cycle and are fine to have in your worm farm. Ants often indicate your worm farm is too dry, so add a few drops of moisture if they become a problem. You can also place the legs of your worm farm in bowls of water to cut off their pathway.

### **REMEMBER:**

Worm farms process less food than a compost bin, so make sure you're not overfeeding your worms. Uneaten food will begin to smell and attract unwanted pests. Only feed again when the previous lot of feed has nearly gone.

Each day a worm will consume approximately its own body weight in food. This means you can feed your worm farm a few handfuls every few days. Once it's established and the worms are breeding, you can try feeding them more.

Cutting food into small pieces and or processing in a food processor makes it easier and quicker for the worms to consume



### **Here are some interesting worm facts:**

Worldwide, approximately 6,000 species of earthworms are described in 20 families, eight of which are represented in Australia. Australian natives are estimated to total 1,000 species belonging to three of these families.

Invertebrates make up 97% of species on earth without backbones and worms are just one of them.

Worms are most definitely a gardener's friend and are vital to soil health. As they burrow beneath the ground, they consume soil, feeding on decomposing organic matter such as roots and leaves, sand grains and microorganisms. As the organic matter passes through their digestive systems, vital minerals and nutrients are transported and it's been shown that not only is worm digested soil healthier, it also has more phosphorous.

Worms are a sign of healthy soil. If there's no food they'll go elsewhere. The more worms in your soil, the more nutritious it is, not only for them but for your plants! If you don't see any signs of worms, simply add more organic matter and they will find it.

The burrows that worms create act as ducts that water and oxygen can pass through, helping to keep soil moist and aerated, vital for good plant growth allowing roots to grow and develop.

Worms are hermaphroditic (they have both male and female reproductive organs) but they need to mate with other worms to produce offspring. After they've mated, worms form tiny, grain sized cocoons that are buried. They can produce up to two cocoons a week, each containing 1-7 hatchlings. After a two to four-week gestation period, the baby worms emerge.

Lots of animals like birds and chooks love to eat worms but there's enough for them in a healthy garden to cater for them all – there could be as many as 1,000,000 worms living in an acre lot of land.

Worms don't have lungs, they breathe through their skin. If there's too much rain, worms will rise to the surface to breathe as they may become starved of oxygen in water drenched soil. However, light paralyses worms so if they're out in it for more than an hour, they can't retreat back into the safety of darkness and will die.

During darkness worms often feed on the soil surface. If you head outside with a torch you'll spot them all diving back under cover when they see the light, just like a pool full of synchronised swimmers.

Worms have no eyes, ears or teeth but can have up to five hearts.

Contradictory to popular belief, if you chop a worm in half it won't grow again and will die... twice.

