Worm composting effective

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Composting is so common today that it's hard to find a gardener without at least one compost pile.

The art of composting has progressed to the point where gardeners frequently deploy several methodologies to keep themselves supplied with rich black humus all year. My favorite method is vermicomposting, or composting with worms.

In this process, microorganisms begin to break down organic matter, and worms consume the microorganisms to produce nutrient-rich worm castings.

Under normal circumstances (in the soil), a worm produces its own weight in castings each day. Given an average of 2,700,000 worms per acre, that translates into an annual output of about 102,000 metric tons of worm castings per acre.

Vermiculture refines this process by using a worm uniquely adapted for the process, usually Red Wigglers (Eisenia fetida), and a container (worm compostor) in which the composting process takes place.

Shredded newspaper is the most common substrate for worm compostors. A great variety of kitchen wastes, such as banana peels, apple cores, potato skins etc., serve as the organic matter.

A mature worm compostor has the equivalent population density of 6.5 to 8 million worms per acre and these worms are 2 to 4 times more productive than regular earthworms. As a result, vermicomposting is about eight times faster than a hot compost pile and about 30 times faster than a cold compost pile.

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Garden Tales

show that vermicompost cannot only nourish plants, it can also help prevent plant diseases. Add a teaspoon (or small shovelful) to potted plants or transplanted seedlings. Work it into the soil when you're planting vegetable beds. Add a little to water and use within 24 hours as compost tea.

Many people are attracted to vermicomposting because it is an odorless process that can be done in their basements, back porches, or even on the kitchen counter, frequently replacing the compost container. It is also much less labor intensive, producing a compost of consistent texture at a constant rate throughout the year.

New studies are starting to

For more information on composting with worms, including instructions on building your own inexpensive worm compostor, go to http://cars.desu.edu/faculty/mmacciare/worms.