

Let your kids get their hands dirty these school holidays

Entice your children away from the TV or computer games these school holidays with the promise of letting them get their hands dirty. Starting a compost or worm farm to recycle food and garden waste is a great, fun activity that teaches them to save the environment. And it doesn't matter if you live in a house or apartment, you can still provide this fantastic activity for your children.

RENEW NSW, a group focused on improving and initiating waste management solutions, are experts in worm farms and composts and are inviting families around Australia to become experts too! Every Australian sends an average of 1 tonne of waste to landfill each year, this equals 500kgs (or fifty 10kg bags of potatoes) of food and garden waste that is unnecessarily being disposed of in our landfills. But with these two easy and fun projects, children can learn how to do their part and help reduce these levels.

Composting

Explain to your children that composting is the natural breakdown of food and garden waste to create a dark loose and "earth-like" substance. And by composting food and garden waste instead of putting it in the bin is much better for the environment. "Anything that was once plant or animal can be composted. Mixing grass clippings, shredded newspaper, food scraps and prunings make a healthy compost, says Tracey Cornell, Waste Forum Coordinator for the Eastern Riverina of NSW region REROC, one of eight groups within RENEW NSW.

All you need to start a compost is food and green waste and an old garbage bin, wooden boxes or simply an area of land where you can start a compost heap. After every meal look though any food waste with your children to find scraps that can be added to the compost. Let them explore the garden for any garden waste they think can be added as well. This will allow them to feel like they are part of the process, not just observing. Once you have your food and garden waste and a compost bin organised, work through 4 simple and easy steps with your children to create a compost. (See Appendix 1 for these 4 steps)

Eight weeks later the compost should be ready to use. Children will love using the compost they helped create around the garden or pot plants.

Worm Farms



Children at the Sandhills Childcare Centre, Byron Bay getting their hands dirty adding worms to their worm farm. NEWF Early Childhood Waste Wise Education program.

For families who live in an apartment, a worm farm is the ideal way to teach your children about recycling greenwaste and it can be done indoors or outside and all year round. Children will love the feeling of the worms as they wriggle in their hands!

Inform your children that when cared for properly, worms process food quickly, transforming food wastes into nutrient-rich 'castings.' These worm castings create an excellent fertilizer for gardens or pot plants. Before your children start digging around the garden for worms, let them know that the worm farm requires a special type of worm known as the Red Wiggler. Red Wiggler worms will eat any food and garden scraps except for citrus and onions. Like children, the Red Wiggle worms have tiny mouths and need the scraps chopped up into tiny pieces before they can eat it.

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A worm farm can be built in 7 easy to follow steps. (See Appendix 2 for details). Children will be amazed as they see the progress of their worm farm as it turns from scraps to rich 'castings.'

"It's easy to talk about how to reduce waste, but by using the worm farm to process the children's food scraps they can see, smell and really experience the process of turning waste into a resource," said Gordon Fraser-Quick, North East Waste Forum Coordinator (NEWF), another one of eight groups within RENEW NSW.

Starting a compost or worm farm with your children is an interactive learning experience and a different, creative activity to keep them occupied during the holidays. And they will also love spending quality time with you!

So what are you waiting for? Create a compost or worm farm with your children today! The environment, your garden and your children will thank you!

Further information on **RENEW NSW** can be found on their website: www.renewnsw.com.au.

Interviews are available with –

Tracey Cornell, REROC Coordinator – 02 6931 9050

Gordon Fraser-Quick, NEWF Coordinator – 02 6687 7066

Stephen Sykes, RENEW NSW Chair – 0419 415 110

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For further media enquiries, interviews or photo opportunities, please contact Amy Reiha or Lisa-Shae Butler at Niche Product Marketing on (02) 9331 6662 or amy@nichepm.com.au or lisa@nichepm.com.au

Appendix 1

Starting a compost takes 4 easy steps –

<p>Step 1: Choosing a site – find a site that is well shaded in summer and has good drainage.</p>
<p>Step 2: What to compost – compost needs a mixture of rich organic foods and nitrogen-poor materials. Organic foods include vegetable and food scraps and fresh grass clippings and green weeds. Nitrogen-poor materials include paper, dry leaves and dead flowers.</p>
<p>Step 3: Layering – Start with a thick layer of coarse materials such as twigs and mulch. This allows for drainage. Follow with a thin layer of organic kitchen and greenwaste, then a layer of nitrogen-poor materials. Continue the layering process with layers of organic kitchen and greenwaste and nitrogen-poor materials. After each layer make sure to add water every few days to keep the compost moist.</p>
<p>Step 4: Maintaining your compost – Add air to the compost by turning the compost with a garden fork weekly and make sure to keep it moist not wet to avoid odours.</p>

Appendix 2

There are 7 easy steps to starting a worm farm –

<p>Step 1: You can purchase an already made plastic worm farm or you can use recycled materials such as foam boxes to hold your worm farm. You will need 2 boxes. Cut holes in the bottom of one box to allow for drainage and then place this box over the box without holes. Create a tap in the bottom box to let out liquid. Collect this liquid in a container and use it as a fertiliser on your plants. It is extremely beneficial to plants and soil!</p>
<p>Step 2: Use newspaper, cardboard, leaves or straw with a few handfuls of soil and sand to create the bedding of the worm farm. Make sure to wet the bedding so that it's moist.</p>
<p>Step 3: Add Red Wiggler worms. Red Wiggler worms eat and expel their own weight everyday which creates quantities of compost. Check the Yellow Pages or Internet to locate your nearest compost worm suppliers. Ordinary earth worms straight from your garden will not survive in your worm farm. Compost worms are very different to earth worms even though they look the same!</p>
<p>Step 4: Add your food waste to the worm farm. Be sure to bury your food waste under the bedding to avoid fruit flies. Foods which can be added to your worm farm include fruit (except for citrus), vegetables (except onion), coffee grounds, tea bags, crushed egg shells, leaves, hair and paper and cardboard.</p>
<p>Step 5: Don't forget to chop up your waste finely so the worms can chew it. They will love you for it. Don't over feed your worm farm. If it starts to smell bad, go sludgy or gets an infestation of flies, stop adding food scraps for a while.</p>
<p>Step 6: Cover your worm farm with newspaper or a Hessian material and make sure to add water whenever the bedding looks dry. Do not place your worm farm in direct sun light or where it will get wet when raining.</p>
<p>Step 7: After a few months there should be little to no bedding visible and the contents will be worm castings – brown and earthy looking. To harvest these worm castings, move the castings to one side of the worm farm and add fresh bedding in its place. The worms will move to the new bedding in search of food. Leave the worm farm for a few days to allow the worms to move to the new bedding before removing the worm castings. Use these worm castings as fertilizer for your garden or pot plants.</p>

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