Why compost with worms? It’s faster, it’s fun, it reduces landfill waste, it makes excellent fertilizer. And in Minnesota, we can use them to compost year ‘round, indoors.

Worms need:

A Home - You can order fancy worm bins or use an opaque Rubbermaid-type tub or a wooden box. Drill holes in the top and sides for air. Drill holes in the bottom so excess water and worm tea can drain out. Build up a bedding layer. Use shredded newspaper or cardboard, dry leaves, coir, wood chips, some peat moss, etc. Add grit: some sand, finely crushed eggshells, coffee grounds, or soil. Get everything moist - like a damp sponge. Keep in a 55°-77° place (worms die in freezing temps and dry out if too warm) - the basement or a heated porch in winter is perfect. Add your red wiggler worms. (Order online or find someone with extras). Don’t use regular earthworms or night crawlers - they won’t survive. Leave the lid off and shine a bright light the first day or two so the worms burrow down and don’t climb the walls to escape.

Food - After 3 days, bury some food under one corner of the bedding. Worms eat almost anything, including fruits and vegetables, beans, bread, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags (remove the staple), spaghetti, etc. Don’t use onions or garlic, and too many citrus peels will kill them. Never add meat, fats, or dairy (milk) products - they will stink and attract pests. Also, never add plastics, metal, or pet waste. Completely cover the food with the damp bedding so it doesn’t attract fruit flies. If the tub gets too wet, leave the lid off for a day or two. If it’s too dry, spray the bedding with water. Add more food to a different section of the box next time. The worms will find it and leave behind their castings. Keep rotating the feeding areas. They eat the bedding too! If you go on vacation, happy worms can survive several weeks without any care.

After 6 months or more, you can harvest the worm compost, clean the tub, and give your worms fresh bedding. There are two ways to do this:

Sideways - Put new food only at one end of the box for two weeks. Most of the worms will go to that end. Scoop out the compost at the other end, wipe out the box, and add new bedding. Next time you feed, put the food at that end, and after all the worms have moved back to that end, scoop and clean the other end.

Dump & Sort - On a large piece of plastic, dump out the entire box. Divide the contents into several piles. Since the worms can’t stand light, they will burrow down. Collect the tops and sides of the mounds, let them dig down again, and repeat until there are just little piles of worms. Put fresh bedding in the bin, then dump the worms back in.

Use the compost around your plants - it won’t burn them, but is very high in nutrients. If your worms have produced worm leachate dripping out the bottom of the bin, dilute it 1:20, since it is VERY strong.

To learn other ways to create worm bins or how to care for your worms, go to www.wormwoman.com, www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/vermicomposting/pubs/ag473-18_wormsrecycle-revised-2012.pdf or other vermicomposting websites.

An excellent book is Worms Eat My Garbage by Mary Appelhof, Flowerfield Enterprises 1997