
worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/09/26 12:41

I have been worm composting for 4 months now, using a plastic stackable system. I harvested my first tray a few weeks ago (great stuff for my container plants) and began a new tray, but the worms are now hanging out in the bottom collection tray. I tried moving them up to the working tray but they return to the bottom tray in a few days. There are worms in the working tray with food and shredded newspaper. My manual does not address this situation. Is there something I can do to lure them up into the working tray? Would appreciate any input.

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by Srenre - 2009/09/26 14:31

OK before I give my opinion I HAVE ONLY HAD WORMS FOR 2 WEEKS! Please wait for a pro to reply as this is all based on theory.

Anyway I have been reading and reading and reading.... about worms, bins, inside bins, outside bins,...

My thoughts... Is your collection tray for leachate or castings?

If for casting there is probably food left in the lower tray.

If for leachate you might have too much or not enough water in your upper bin.

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/09/26 18:59

the collection tray is for leachate ...leachate... worm tea (!) and I collect about 1/2 c. per day. the bin is outside in the shade, per instructions. my next step is to add more shredded newspaper with the food, thinking there's too much moisture. we'll see. thanks for your input. good luck on your worms, too. CST

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cathd - 2009/09/27 07:19

You will always get some worms 'exploring' but if all your worms are heading downwards, I'd worry that your working trays are inhospitable to them. Put a clump of 'safe' bedding into the lowest tray that they can retreat to if they need to (safe bedding- some of your harvested castings mixed with damp cardboard/ newspaper/ leaves etc)

If you put a layer of garden weed suppressing membrane below the lowest working tray, the worms cannot get to the leachate tray. This also means that you can leave the tap open on your leachate tray (with something below it to collect leachate) and allow more air into your system from below.

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/09/27 11:44

thanks for your suggestion. I'll work on my safe bedding. appreciate it. CST

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by Srenre - 2009/09/27 18:48

Ok, so again I am no expert....

How many worm would you guess are in your bin? If you have a small amount then a half cup everyday seems like a lot from fresh bedding.

Are you adding water? The worms might be following the food. Remember that they are looking for the bacteria on decaying matter.

If you are adding a lot of water "rinsing" bacteria down then maybe they are just following the food?

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by wellsworms - 2009/10/03 08:21

Perhaps the bedding is to dry near the top . I have noticed that the worms congregate near the moisture

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/10/03 13:09

thanks for all your suggestions. I added a lower tray with safe bedding and the group has not moved to the collection tray.....yet. It's been several days. BUT now, we're having a heat wave so I moved the stack to a storage shed -- came home today to ants! With the help if the internet I added water and "stirred" them up a little. Most of them are now gone - - needless to say I also moved them out of the shed to another spot that should be shady and cooler. Hope the remaining ants don't call the others. This moisture/heat thing is tricky for me. Thanks again for all your input.

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by sauce man - 2009/10/10 09:15

Iv'e had a stackable system for years now and Iv'e noticed that worms always go down in the tray. I clean it out about every 2 weeks or so, no big deal. I then put them back in the top tray. I also rotate my trays frequently. When I am done feeding a tray it gets moved to the top and as soon as the food is gone they all move down. It seems backwards from everything I read but this is how mine works. In five years i haven't had any issues with my herd.

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/10/12 23:11

very interesting handling of your trays. I'll consider this. thanks for your input. CST

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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by MikeJ - 2009/10/20 17:18

I'm surprised nobody else has pointed this out, but 2 things:

1. leachate is NOT the same thing as worm tea.
 2. If you are getting 1/2 cup of leachate per day then you are practically drowning your worms. You should rarely if ever get leachate dripping from your bins.
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Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/10/21 21:09

thanks for responding MikeJ.

1. I've heard both terms used interchangeably -- how do you define each?
2. the liquid is because I pre-freeze the plant matter and defrost it to room temp before chopping it up and adding it to the tray. I read that freezing breaks up the cell and helps digestion.

as an update, I've added a tray between the collection tray and feeding tray and they've stopped congregating in the collection tray.

thanks again for your reply. appreciate you taking the time. CST

Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by MikeJ - 2009/10/26 12:01

1. The composition of the liquid dripping from the bin is entirely dependent on the contents of the bin at the time. It is essentially the liquid dripping from the rotting food scraps. If the bin is mature, meaning it contains a lot of castings, then the liquid might pick up some beneficial bacteria as it soaks down through the castings. Even so you probably don't want to pour this on your plants. It might or might not help but it is chancy.

When most people talk about tea they are referring to a liquid that is specifically brewed for tea. They add castings to a bucket of water along with molasses or similar food source then let it brew for a day or two. Some people add aquarium bubblers to ensure a good oxygen supply.

2. The liquid from food scraps is usually not a problem assuming you do not add more water and you do not overfeed. The usual cause of a too-wet bin is adding water in addition to what is in the food. Note - the water content of food scraps varies. If you use food with a high water content (lettuce, tomatoes) you might need to let the food drain before adding it to your bin.

I have also read about freezing food to break down the cells but I have my doubts. I regularly freeze my people food. When thawed it looks just like it did before I froze it. I do freeze my scraps but that is to preserve them until time to add them to my bins.

Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/11/08 19:04

re worm tea, is it necessary to run a pump to add oxygen? is there an alternative? what would happen if I made a batch without oxygenating it? thanks. CST

Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by MikeJ - 2009/11/10 17:06

Here is my method:

Thursday evening I start a batch in a 5-gallon bucket. As I fill the bucket with the hose I make sure to get lots of bubbles in the water so it starts out with plenty of oxygen.

Friday morning before work I dip a cup into the water, hold it up above the bucket and pour it back in to the bucket, stirring up plenty of bubbles. I do this about 10 times. I do this again Friday evening after dinner.

Saturday morning my tea has a nice foamy head indicating the bacteria are thriving. That is when I use the tea.

A bubbler is more work to set up but it lets you walk away until the tea is done. I have no experience letting the tea sit without adding bubbles.

Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/11/11 19:36

thank you for your response, MikeJ. you've been a great resource for me and I appreciate it very much. sounds yummy....gotta go and get a 5-gallon bucket now! thanks again, CST

Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by jeffw - 2009/11/14 18:53

My guess is there is too much light on top tray..worms like it "pitch black" and they are very sensitive to any light even if it is a faded light through surface.

I have "see through" bins for study purpose and as soon as you remove the cover they start bugging out and sliding back to the inner bin area real fast and that's only "dim lighting" from the outside so I can see through the port holes I made in the side.

Just a thought anyway ;)

Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by cst4ewa - 2009/11/14 19:41

thanks Jeff. I did notice the afternoon sun was beginning to touch the bin, so I put a shield up to block out the sun. Because I don't have the bins under cover, like in a garage or shed, between the heat of the summer and the moving sun, I'm learning to keep my eye on the sun. I'll continue to watch it as the temps drop, but in SoCAL, how low can it go? thanks again.

picked up a 5-gallon bucket from Home Depot and made my first batch of tea, to protect my plants. looking forward to foam.

thanks to all of you for sharing. CST

Re:worms in collection tray

Posted by jeffw - 2009/11/15 22:33

Your welcome...I am no expert but what is an expert anyway right?:P

My cousin has a sheep farm and 3 years + we have been working with worms and sheep compost now using it in bins. Idea comes to mind here and I am trying it now matter a fact. I cut a 4 inch "thin wall" PVC about 16 inches long then cut out some holes into the side (you can use a band saw) so worms and get in and out of it.

What I am trying is this. I have a 2 foot deep worm bin and each PVC that is standing up in it get's a different food source. So then I can check them at times to see which ones are getting the most attention. They are all located in a large bin about 7 feet long and 3 feet wide and about 2 feet deep.

So far I see the wigglers LOVE corn meal and the red worms (we call em "drill heads")like about anything so they are super bin worms because we find them at bottom,sides and the surface area.

My message is that IF your bin is not giving the worms what they want OR it is too toxic or whatever then they might go into one of these PVC chambers as option to "escape" whatever it is they are trying to get away from. You mention they were going down and that is what I am trying to get at. If the worm has an option it WILL take it. We see this on the farm they will change their habits almost over night at times. One day they are here and at this level then next day you move to a "toxic wet manure" area and there are thousands of them. Even the weather changes how they act.

Cousins bin and mine are 14 miles apart and yet if I see little ones on the floor for no good reason I call my cousin and guess what? He says "yep same thing here" but then when they stop running away his also stop. So we know it is the "barometer" that causes this because it always happened before or during a rain or seasonal change.

Maybe we are nuts I don't know. But we have been really watching these 2 worm cultures very close.

Just some FYI for anyone interested :)

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