

FOOD WASTE

Food waste comprises approximately 40% of Australia's total waste stream, creating nearly one tonne of greenhouse gas emissions at our landfill sites each year (Australian Greenhouse Office). It is also one of the easiest waste streams to reduce. By buying only what you need and composting or worm farming, food wastes can be significantly lessened.

Compostable food comes from many sources such as spoiled fruits and vegetables, stale bread and leftovers. Composting involves the controlled biological decomposition of organic materials by "heat loving" bacteria and fungi consuming the organic matter. Food that decays with no fresh air generates three to four times more greenhouse gas than if it breaks down with the help of aeration. Composting is com-

monly created in open windows or piles and by turning the material over regularly (this can be done with a shovel or by inserting air supply pipes). Effectively decomposed organic matter becomes compost and can be used to enrich your soil.

Worms used in worm farms can eat about half their body weight in food per day! Worm farms consist of three or four stackable bins where the worms live and wriggle their way up through the bins, consuming your organic waste. The 'castings' they leave can then be used as a great fertiliser for your garden.

Composting and worm farming are two great methods that recycle food and garden waste, leaving far less waste to be disposed of and reduce environmental damage caused by greenhouse gases.

WHAT CAN I DO?

In the home, reduce perishable goods being spoiled and buy only what you need, when you need it. Vegetable scraps can be composted or worm farmed with garden waste. Freeze unused food for later use.

Worm farming and composting can be carried out in a wide variety of ways and at any scale. The type and size of the system used by an individual, household or

business will depend on the amount of organic waste the system has to deal with and space constraints of the site.

If you are in the food service industry, waste reduction tips are available at www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BizWaste/FactSheets/FoodSrvcs.htm. You may also consult your council and find out whether there are food distributors for the poor in your area.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.greenhouse.gov.au/gwci/food.html- The Australian Greenhouse Office information on effective and efficient composting
- www.ciwmb.ca.gov/FoodWaste/- California's integrated waste management board provides great information and links regarding food waste issues and how to combat them.
- www.environment.nsw.gov.au/publications/html/downtoearth/composting.htm
All you need to know about composting.