



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Create your own compost to reduce your Carbon foot print**

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*We are all responsible for the demise of our fragile environment. Although most people have started to recycle some of their rubbish, people are unaware of the importance of also separating their organic waste.*

Once organic matter starts decomposing, it produces methane gas; this gas is approximately 21 times more harmful than CO<sub>2</sub>. These two gases are the core of greenhouse gases that have had a dramatic impact on our climate over the past few years. People are therefore encouraged to realise the importance of starting their own compost heap at home.

If everyone created their own compost heap in their garden, a significant amount of pressure will also be taken off our already over stretched landfills. The Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA) provides some guidance on how to get started.

The latest trend to reduce the amount of rubbish your household throws away (by up to 25%) is to start a worm farm and minimise the amount of organic waste you produce. The less food waste you put in your bin, the fewer flies and parasites are likely to come and find something to snack on.

Vermiculture is the technical term used to describe worm farming, and the left over bi-products after digestion by the worms are called castings. Castings are regarded as one of the better and safest fertilizers available and they feel and look like good quality soil. In fact, castings are five times richer in nutrients than good topsoil. The Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town uses what they call 'worm tea'. It is another non-smelly bi-product made by soaking castings in water and using the water to fertilize the soil, it has also proved to be a natural pest repellent. With natural topsoil disappearing at an alarming rate, supplementing your garden's soil with castings is an environmental must, and an excellent, inexpensive way of managing soil loss whilst managing your organic waste.

Earthworms can safely be fed on paper including cardboard and egg cartons, tea bags and coffee grounds, vegetable peelings and other kitchen organic waste including eggshells. But never feed the worms meat or dairy products. There are a few plants, even though they are organic, that

should never be fed to your worms. Pineapple contains an enzyme that will dissolve the earthworms, and any citrus or highly acidic vegetables, such as onions, should be used sparingly. Another cautionary ingredient is your garden's grass cuttings, too much will generate excess heat and levels of ammonia that will kill the worms.

Your earthworms will never overpopulate, as they self-regulate their reproduction. The more food there is the more they will reproduce and vice versa.

Remember to keep the farm in a shady place and only use composting worms or Red Wigglers (*Eisenia foetida*); garden worms will not be able to do the job correctly.

If worms aren't your cup of tea, then the regular compost heap is still the way to go if you want to help the environment. You may think that only hippies and old people make use of compost heaps, but your Granny was onto something good.

There are two basic elements when it comes to compost - green (grass clippings and tree and bush clippings) and brown garden debris (dry leaves, soil). Start a very basic compost heap by simply piling up leaves and grass clippings. Try for a balance of one part green debris to two parts brown debris. Brown and green debris should be stacked in alternating layers. Make sure the heap is damp, but not wet. Once your heap is constructed, add any other organic waste and turn it weekly with a garden fork. You'll have compost in about two months. You can begin using the compost from the bottom of the heap when you turn it over and can't recognise the component parts any longer.

It is important to remember not to compost animal waste, meats, oils, diseased plants or plants treated with weed killers. Healthy compost smells pleasantly earthy – if yours does not, turn it more often and add more dry soil and dry leaves. Water your compost heap only during dry months and then only enough to moisten it; don't drench the heap.

If you live in a flat, you can still separate your organic matter and take it to your nearest garden refuse site, where it will be turned into compost."

For more tips on reducing your carbon footprint, contact the Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa at: 011 675 3464, or visit [www.iwmsa.co.za](http://www.iwmsa.co.za) for more information.

For more information on composting visit [www.homemakersonline.co.za/features/134/how-to-begin-a-compost-heap/](http://www.homemakersonline.co.za/features/134/how-to-begin-a-compost-heap/) or [www.botany.uwc.ac.za/EnvFacts/facts/compost.htm](http://www.botany.uwc.ac.za/EnvFacts/facts/compost.htm). More on worm farms: <http://www.urbansprout.co.za/directory/offering/compost+bins+.+wormeries/>\*

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