

Q.14 How do I keep ants out of my Reln Worm Factory?

A. Ants will enter your Reln Worm Factory if you have a lot of them in your backyard and particularly if you have let the bedding become too dry or acidic. Add water to raise the moisture level and add a liberal quantity of garden lime to where the ants are gathering. This should discourage them. If they persist remove them physically and smear some vaseline around the legs or place each leg in a container of water to isolate the system.

Q.15 Will the Reln Worm Factory attract flies?

A. No the Reln Worm Factory is fly-proof against household flies. Sometimes the very small vinegar fly (often mistaken for the fruit fly) gets in, but these do no harm. However, very large numbers of the vinegar fly may indicate that you are feeding the Reln Worm Factory too much and may be a prelude to problems such as offensive odours. To eradicate vinegar flies, slow your rate of feeding to what the worms will eat on a daily basis.

Q.16 What about maggots?

A. Should you experience any influx of maggots, it will most likely be the soldier fly or vinegar fly larvae. The soldier fly larvae grow up to an inch big starting out white but soon turning dark grey with distinct ribbing bands. Fishermen say they make great bait. The vinegar fly larvae are small, usually 1/4 inch or less. Don't be too alarmed if they appear. They are actually beneficial to the waste breakdown. If you want to remove them though, do so by liberally applying lime, or placing bread soaked in milk on the surface of the compost. Larvae love bread and should infest it. Remove the bread after 2-3 days and dispose of it.

Q.17 Will the Reln Worm Factory smell?

A. The only smell associated with a well maintained Reln Worm Factory is a pleasant rainforest odour. If your Reln Worm Factory has an offensive smell, it is an indication that anaerobic bacteria have built up in the system in uneaten food wastes. Stop feeding the worms and stir the wastes in the top tray lightly with a garden fork adding lime as well. This aerates the organic material and allows worms to move through it more easily. Repeat this aeration procedure regularly to prevent recurrence. Start feeding again when all smells are gone.

Q.18 What about holidays?

A. Leaving an established Reln Worm Factory for 3-4 weeks without constantly adding food is not a problem. Just feed the worms a good quantity of food waste (1/2 of a tray full) before you leave. Make sure that you leave the unit in a cool place under cover and leave the tap open with a container under it. Putting a soaked newspaper on top of your hessian will give added protection against their bedding drying out.

Q.19 My worms are in the collector tray?

A. There are many reasons why the worms will move down into the Collector Tray. To encourage the worms to return to the First Working Tray a standard ice cream container upside down in the centre of the Collector Tray on top of newspaper and covered by newspaper, will provide the worms a path from the Collector Tray preventing the worms from drowning.

For further Questions or general information contact:

Reln Plastics Pty. Ltd.  
Williamson Road,  
Ingleburn, NSW 2566  
Phone: 02 9605 9999  
Fax: 02 9605 9222  
Email: sales@reln.com.au  
Internet: www.reln.com.au



# THE WORM FACTORY

## Questions & Answers



Q&A WF/001 IMG049RP

A Compilation of the most commonly asked Questions about the Reln Worm Factory

Reln Plastics has produced this facts sheet on the most commonly asked questions about the Worm Factory. We have consulted experts from the field of vermiculture to provide you Answers and hints that will ensure the most efficient use of your Worm Factory.

Q.1 Where can I obtain compost worms from?

A. A preferred worm sellers list is included with this manual. We recommend you purchase your compost worms from one of the reputable growers on this list. (1000 worms minimum)

Q.2 How much will my worm eat?

A. This depends on how many worms you have. Worms can eat up to half their own body weight every day and can double their population every few months. If you start your 'Factory' with 1000 mature worms (identify mature worms by a distinct ring shaped swelling around their body) they will consume up to 250 grams of scraps per day. After a few months you should have 2000 worms and you can feed them more. The baby worms, however, won't eat much and will take about 3 months to mature. As you become familiar with them you will learn their rate of food consumption.

Q.3 How can I help the worms to eat more?

A. Worms will feed at a faster rate once they have adapted to any new food source. Worms will also eat more if kitchen scraps are mashed, blended or food processed. Controlling temperature to around 24°C will improve the overall performance of your system. Worms will leave very acidic food such as onions and orange peels until after they have eaten their preferred foods. A handful of garden lime every few weeks will help to balance the effect of acidic foods. The regular addition of worm fattener will encourage stronger, fatter worms. Since they consume up to their own body weight each day, the fatter they are the more wastes they will eat.

Q.4 What shouldn't I feed my worms?

A. Be careful what you feed your worms particularly if you are unaware of its source. Manures, for example, from horses, cattle or dogs often has Vermicides still active in it that were designed to kill parasitic worms in the animal. They can kill all your worms in one day. We recommend you allow the manures to age before you use them.

Q.5 Can I feed my worms garden refuse?

A. Not usually. Your Reln Worm Factory is designed to break down soft organic waste. Slow composting organic wastes such as garden refuse are best dealt with by conventional aerobic composting methods, such as the Reln Green Compost Bin.

Q.6 I've had my Reln Worm Factory for nearly a month now, but the worms don't seem to be eating?

A. The worms may be eating your bedding material if you have used manure or compost in addition to your Reln Worm Factory Bedding Block. If that is the case the worms will eat through this before eating any introduced food. If just the bedding block is used the worms should readily eat introduced food waste.

Q.7 Should I add water to the Reln Worm Factory?

A. Watering of the Reln Worm Factory will enhance the production of liquid fertiliser. Food wastes are about 80% water which is released as the worms break them down. This will tend to stay in the bedding for a long time before eventually draining out. If you pour a bucket of water over the hessian and scraps each week or two and then place the empty bucket under the open tap, you will have a constant supply of liquid fertiliser. The sudden 'flood' will not harm the worms but will simulate a heavy rain fall. Any dry material such as newspaper or cardboard should be pre-soaked before being added to the Reln Worm Factory. It is important to keep a moist hessian bag or wet newspaper over the freshly added food to encourage the worms to move up to feed off the surface. This will provide a dark damp shelter for them.

Q.8 Will I get too many worms?

A. No, you can never have too many worms. They self regulate their population to the confines of available space and the amount of food you give them. Worm concentration should reach capacity (about 15,000 to 20,000 worms) after 2 - 5 years.

Q.9 Can I put compost worms in the garden?

A. Only if you have a thick surface layer of mulch in your garden. Compost worms require moist conditions all year round because they don't tunnel deep like pasture worms to find moisture. If you cannot provide this environment in your garden, don't introduce compost worms.

Q.10 Why aren't the worms moving up from the lower level into the top working tray?

A. This situation could arise in two ways. First, you may be adding new food too soon before the worms can eat the previous food. This will result in a lot of uneaten food being distributed through the system and a general reluctance by the worms to migrate upwards whilst they can still access food lower in the system. Before adding the new tray, stop feeding the worms for at least a week to ensure that all existing food in the lower tray has been

eaten. Worms will then move up to consume food from the surface as this is their natural behaviour pattern. Secondly, you may not have waited for the level of worm castings to pass the line on the inside of the tray before adding the next tray. This will create a gap preventing the worms from reaching the top tray.

Q.11 What about severe temperatures?

A. Worms will tolerate a wide temperature range from about 10° - 30°C. If it gets much hotter than this make sure the Reln Worm Factory is in a shady cool position. Take the lid off and hose the whole unit down keeping the bottom drainage tap turned on. If you live in an area that suffers from frosts, put your Reln Worm Factory in the warmest possible position, an example being your laundry, garage or shed. If it is on a balcony or in the backyard then cover the unit with a couple of old carpet underfelts or old blankets to keep some warmth in. Feed them a lot more food waste which will create some warmth as they decompose.

Q.12 It's raining and the worms seem to be gathering in the lid. What do I do?

A. What you are noticing is the worms sensitivity to pressure changes in the weather. They will often go up into the lid even before it rains. In nature this takes them out of the soil to stop them flooding and drowning. Move the Reln Worm Factory out of the rain. Take the worms out of the lid and replace them in the bedding.

Q.13 Are the little white worms in my Reln Worm Factory baby earthworms?

A. No, baby earthworms are not white, but clear to opaque, before developing a reddish colour. They are just visible at this stage. The 'white worm' you are noticing is a type of worm called entrachyadids. They will not hurt compost worms but they do indicate acidic conditions, which can be overcome by the regular addition of a handful of lime. By placing a piece of moist bread in your Reln Worm Factory you can also lure the white worms to a small area for easy removal. It is important to note that many organisms that may appear in your Reln Worm Factory (such as large populations of minute red mites and large soldier fly larvae) are beneficial to the break down of organic material, so there is no need to remove them.