A feasible composting solution for sectional title unit occupants
By Rob Paddock

Many homeowners with gardens in South Africa have some kind of composting system in operation, and are able to turn their organic kitchen and garden waste into useful compost with very little effort. However, **for people living in sectional title schemes looking to compost their organic waste**, composting is substantially harder. Firstly, most occupants are not inclined to keep a smelly decomposing heap of organic waste on their bathroom floor, and secondly, even fewer are happy to have the associated pests and wildlife that inevitably come with a conventional compost heap.

There is a rather wiggly and surprisingly clean and odour-free solution to this predicament for sectional title occupants: **red worms.**

Vermicomposting, or worm composting, is the decomposition of organic waste with red worms in a custom-built "wormery". The process creates a fine black granular compost called "castings". Worm castings are an excellent source of slow-release soil nutrients for your unit's pot plants. They also act as an excellent soil additive that prevents the soil from caking in potted plants.

Considerations for your wormery

There are a number of pre-manufactured and purpose-built wormeries available from specialist stores or online. However, if you want to make your own wormery, here are a few tips:

Bedding – Red worms can live in wormeries made from plastic or wood. These containers are partially filled with bedding material, most commonly shredded newspaper, shredded cardboard, straw or a combination of these materials.

Moisture – The worm bedding should be kept as moist as a well-wrung sponge. Occasionally, the bedding can become too wet and needs to be gently loosened with a hand cultivator or small garden fork.

Acidity – Red worms prefer bedding that it slightly acidic. However, if the materials added are very acidic, add crushed and dried eggshells to reduce the acidity.

Light – Red worms are very sensitive to light and need an opaque bin that has a lid or a dark plastic bag placed over the bedding to keep the light out.

Ventilation – Most wormeries also have some means of ventilation, either through holes drilled in the bin itself or a system of air tubing that runs through the bin from one side to another. Additional dry bedding material can also be added to help keep air in the bedding.

Drainage – Wormeries with holes in the bottom for drainage should be placed on one by two inch blocks on a plastic tray. The tray will collect any liquid that drains from the bin. A piece of sheer fabric should be laid over the drainage holes to prevent the worms from falling through.

Choosing the size of your bin
The following guide will help you decide what size of wormery you will need. You should

keep in mind that red worms eat their own weight in food every day. In other words, if you produce two kilograms of organic waste every day, then you should have two kilograms of worms in your bin. If you find that your red worms are being overfed, simply get another bin and more worms.

Number of people	Quantity of worms	Bin size
1 to 2	0.5kg	60 x 60 x 30 cm
2 to 3	1kg	75 x 60 x 30 cm
4 to 6	1.5 to 2 kg	90 x 60 x 30 cm

Finding your worms
While suitable worms can be found in the wild, the most sensible option is to purchase your worms from specialist stores or commercial growers.

I ended my last article on recycling in sectional title schemes by saying, “If you are serious about making a change, bear in mind that it takes 21 days to break a habit.”

That is fine to say when it comes to recycling in your scheme. However, it may take a bit longer than 21 days to get over phobias that exist around wriggly creatures like red worms. My advice is to grit your teeth and get through it; you'll learn to love them eventually!

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