



Why Do Redworms C-R-A-W-L Off?

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C - Change of Habitat

If worms have been raised with a particular feedstock or bedding material and are then transferred to a system that uses completely different material and feed, the worms may crawl away from the new, shockingly different habitat.

A few good questions to ask the grower that you purchase worms from are: What species of worm they raise, what bedding are they raised in, and what is their primary feedstock?

It would be best if a buyer gets worms that are raised in a similar environment that they intend to use. When buying redworms be sure they are the correct species for your purposes and not a species that will die easily in your climate.

Some companies say they are selling redworms, when in fact they are selling a different species. *Eisenia fetida* redworms can thrive in temperatures ranging from 34 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit, so they do well in all parts of the country. *Eisenia fetida* redworms process just about any organic material.

Other species, such as *Perionyx excavates* (which some erroneously call redworms), die if exposed to 45 degree temperatures. *Perionyx excavatus* do okay in the Gulf States of the USA, India, South America, etc. but not where the climate gets below 45 degrees F for any length of time. Species such as *Perionyx excavatus* do okay in manure piles, but are not suitable for in-vessel (worm bins) type systems; they will crawl out en masse for no apparent reason & they never get big enough to use as a bait worm. (Check our Invertebrates article for more information about *Perionyx excavatus*).

To keep worms in the bin so they'll adapt to a new environment, keep them in a place where you can leave a light on. Since worms are sensitive to light, they'll stay in the bin to avoid the light. It is imperative that the light stay on at night or you may wake up to a mass vermicide. This technique does not work for *P. excavatus*. When they want to crawl, they crawl!

If you've had your system in operation for a while and the worms crawl off, perhaps you've changed their habitat by adding too much salty, oily or acidic material. Some people have used lime to adjust the pH and caused more harm than good. Crushed eggshells work very well to help balance your system and provide grit for the worm's digestion.

R - Rain

Just before and during a thunderstorm or any low-pressure system, it is natural for worms to crawl up and around the lid of a plastic worm bin. Worms are great natural barometers.

A - Absence of Air

Overfeeding, too much moisture, poor bin design, or not enough ventilation can severely reduce the amount of air available to the worms. Anaerobic bacteria live in the absence of oxygen. If there is a foul smell in the bin it may indicate the presence of large numbers of anaerobic bacteria. If this occurs, the environment may lack enough oxygen for the worms to breathe and they may crawl outside of the bin seeking air or die. Be sure there are enough ventilation and drainage holes in your system and aerate the bedding promptly if a bad smell occurs.

W - Water - Too Much or Too Little

Too much water can cause the bedding to become so compacted that there aren't enough pockets of air for the worms to breathe. Putting wood chips, strips of cardboard, straw, etc., within the bedding can ensure that there is enough air throughout their environment.

Not enough water can cause your worms to try to escape, also. Lack of water will cause your castings to dry out and harden. The population of important microorganisms is lower when the castings dry out, thus diminishing their effectiveness. In order to produce the most useful castings, be sure to manage your moisture carefully.

Don't pour water through your vermicomposting system to make worm tea. To make worm tea: take a cup of castings, soak overnight in a gallon of water, shake to aerate, and use within 24 hours.

L - Lack of Food

If you don't feed your worms regularly they may go looking elsewhere for needed sustenance.

But please **DO NOT OVERFEED!!!** The more you know about worms and what they need, the more you'll enjoy the vermicomposting experience!

* *Eisenia fetida*

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