

# WORM BINS FOR CAMPS AND SCHOOLS



*Campers enjoy feeding the worm bin at YMCA Camp Campbell. "It's an excellent place for kids to study decomposition," says program director Andrea Hesse. "We're always looking for teachable moments in the forest."*

You can reduce your garbage bill and conserve resources by using worms to eat your food scraps.

Composting with worms offers science and environmental education specialists an opportunity to teach children about environmental responsibility, the food chain, reproduction and biology.

Subsidies for equipment purchase and technical assistance are available.

## **BACKGROUND**

Up to 50% of the waste of camps and schools can be food scraps. Garbage bills can be reduced if food scraps can be diverted from the trash by composting on site or other means.

The Integrated Waste Management Act set a mandate of reducing by half the amount of waste deposited in landfills by the year 2000.

The County of Santa Cruz is interested in helping camps and schools to divert their waste to beneficial uses. Organic Recyclers Anonymous received a grant from the County to work with camps and schools that want to set up on-site vermicomposting systems.

Subsidies are available for purchase of bins and worms. The subsidies are provided by the County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors through Organic Recyclers Anonymous.

Technical assistance is available. Technical support will be provided to assure that camps and schools that adopt on-site composting and vermicomposting will be successful in their efforts. As camp and school staff gain experience, they will become self-sufficient at managing their own systems.

Please check with your district Environmental Health inspector before installing a vermicomposting system.



*The worm-feeding crew is ready for action at YMCA Camp Campbell. Worm scraps are collected from the dining room and kitchen.*

## **VERMICOMPOSTING SYSTEMS**

Vermicomposting, also known as composting with worms, is relatively effortless. Setting up the bin and periodically harvesting the castings is all that is required.

Bins that handle 40 pounds (two five-gallon buckets) per week can be constructed for as little as \$60 plus labor.

Worm bins offer a great opportunity to bring new ideas about solid waste issues to youngsters.

Part of the cost of vermicomposting bins, bedding and worms can be paid by the County subsidy. Pre-approval is required.

## **VERMICOMPOSTING AT YMCA CAMP CAMPBELL**

YMCA Camp Campbell serves 75,000 meals to 8,000 guests each year. The camp was disposing of approximately 400 pounds of kitchen and dining room residual fruit and vegetable waste per month. With support from grant funds, the camp purchased four 'industrial-size' worm bins and worms.

Kitchen and dining staff put fruit, vegetable, pasta, bread and coffee ground discards into wheeled carts, which are emptied into the worm bins weekly. Worms convert the food residuals into vermicompost, a valuable soil conditioner.

The camp has incorporated vermicomposting into its educational program. Approximately 6,500 young people who visit the camp are introduced to the idea of using worms to transform food scraps into valuable soil conditioner. As the worm population in the bins grows, teachers who bring students to the camp will be furnished with worms to start a classroom worm bin.

The worm castings are used for restoration projects at the camp, to remediate the impact of campers on the natural environment.



*Worm bins are covered with snug-fitting lids after worm feeding. The bins are lined with hardware cloth for rodent resistance.*

## **BENEFITS FROM DIVERTING FOOD WASTE**

- ◆ On-site vermicomposting can be used as a tool to educate students, campers, parents and employees.
- ◆ Students and campers like to know that they are making a difference.
- ◆ Disposal costs may be reduced.
- ◆ Natural resources are conserved.
- ◆ Support community welfare by helping to extend landfill life.
- ◆ Vermicompost can be used for landscaping or given away. Vermicompost improves soil structure and promotes healthier plants.

