



## Preparing Outdoor Worm Bins for the Winter:

*"What happens to the worms in the winter?"* is one of the questions we hear most often.

What do worms need to survive a winter in New England, or other snowy areas? We of course cannot guarantee anything (especially when it comes to winter in New England), but we keep our worms alive through the cold months using several basic concepts.

The best way to think about worms in the winter is "survival of the fittest". The worms instinctively want to survive so their genes will carry on. If they are cold they will move somewhere warmer if they can. If their surroundings are beginning to freeze, they will move to where they aren't freezing. If conditions are too dry or too wet, they will search out a place that better suits their moisture needs. Our job is to see that they have enough space and a place to go when things get uncomfortable. With this idea in mind, there are several things you can do to make them more comfortable in the winter:

1. Make sure worms kept outside are in a bin without a bottom so they can bury themselves in the dirt below the bin. We have no idea how far down they will go but we do know that they go down. We have found them 2-3 inches down in the summer.
2. Make sure your bin is full so they have plenty of space and there are places for them to hide. Larger amounts of leaves and yard waste will give off some heat as it decays.
3. Do what you can to add insulating materials such as vacuum cleaner bags, dryer lint, old socks or pieces of an old blanket or carpeting to the top of your bin. Some of these things can also be added to the bin in pockets starting now so they will be spread through out the bin as cold weather nears. Make sure the worms have plenty of food and decayed matter. We are using lots of windfall apples right now – they take a long time to rot and will provide food for a good part of the winter.
4. The worms need to continue to be fed all winter. They will slow down their work, but they still get hungry. We have learned to make a hole in the center of the bin where we can put food and then cover it back up with our insulating material – whatever that might be. We have been collecting rejected sheep's wool all summer and are now beginning to add it to our bins on an experimental basis. Dog hair will also work.

5. Your worms still need air and moisture so leaving the top off is fine, especially if you are using other things on top for insulate. Snow is also a good insulator. If you have access to animal manure (not from cats or dogs please!), it can also be a great food and insulator.

If all of this still doesn't work? The worms will start to breed in hopes of saving their genes in the next generation (no joke). The capsules will survive freezing temperatures and hatch in the spring when conditions are right. So if all else fails, you should have the next generation to fall back on.