



Figure 14. In this finished vermicast, you can see that the worms did not consume the potato peels. Whenever possible, avoid putting potato peels in the worm bin. They contribute to anaerobic conditions in the bin. (The greenish material is colored paper towel, which worms do consume.)

What should I feed them?

Red wiggler worms have amazing powers of digestion and will consume just about any organic matter you put in the worm bin. The following types of food are acceptable for feeding worms. Note: Chopping food items into small pieces ($\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch or smaller) ensures faster breakdown by microorganisms.

- **Fruit and vegetable scraps and peels.** Potatoes peels are okay, but worms tend to avoid them (figure 14).
- **Eggshells or other source of grit** (see page 8). These should be ground or pulverized.
- **Coffee grounds, filters, and tea bags with staples removed.** You can mix them into the worm bin at any time.
- **Plain cereal, bread, and pasta.** Use small amounts only, as they tend to clump up. Be sure to wet them first.
- **Dryer lint (natural fibers only, such as cotton, linen, or wool).** Lint provides the “fabric” for air circulation.

Food items that are NOT acceptable

Though your worms will eat just about any organic matter, some types of food may entice undesirable insects and animals to live in the worm bin, too. The foods in the list below are not

appropriate to feed the worms because they attract pests, can be toxic to worms, or create unpleasant odors.

- **Meat, poultry, or fish (bones, skin, or drippings).** These develop odors and easily attract other pests.
- **Oils (such as butter, salad dressing, or mayonnaise).** These smother worms (they breathe through their skin).
- **Dairy products.** These products may cause anaerobic conditions and odors.
- **Highly acidic or spicy foods, such as citrus (especially peels) or onions.** These may produce acidic conditions and may be toxic to worms.
- **Pet feces.** Feces can contain large quantities of pests that are not beneficial to worms or to the final compost product.

The guideline for vermicomposting is: **When in doubt, leave it out!**

Harvesting the Compost

When should I harvest my vermicompost?

Vermicompost or vermicast is a mixture of worm castings and decomposed organic matter (figure 15). It can be very wet at harvest time depending on the kitchen waste you use (for example, lots of banana and fruit peels). If you wish to use a sieve to make debris-free compost, then allow the vermicast to dry first.



Figure 15. Vermicast is a mixture of worm castings and decomposed organic matter.