

They're creepy and they're spookie
They're wiggly and goopie
They're altogether poopie...



No, they're not the Addams family...they're

MEALWORMS!

Yes, those nutritious little bundles of vitamin enriched snack that are the absolute FAV food of many of our feathered friends. It can be challenging to keep a hungry nest of birds fortified with mealworms, but now you too can have the recipe for SUCCESS and cultivate a mealworm farm, right in your own plastic bins.

The mealworm is definitely not your common variety of garden worm, and such a fastidious creature requires the correct moisture, diet and environment to thrive from pupa, to beetle to worm stage and so on through the life cycles.

Here is the recipe from our very own Lisa Limbert, a recipe almost guaranteed to make you the envy of every mealworm farmer in the county.

Growing Mealworms

With Lisa Limbert

East Valley Wildlife rehabbers use mealworms to feed many types of birds. They are also used by people who keep reptiles, sugar gliders, kinkajous, and hedgehogs.

In this article, I am writing about one of my favorite things to do. It may sound strange, but I really enjoy raising mealworms. I have been growing worms for two years. Recently, I achieved my best crop so far. It is for this reason that I wanted to write about my success and, hopefully, encourage others to give worm farming a try.

After much trial and error, I found that raising worms in clear plastic tubs filled with bran works well. I buy my bran from a feed store. One large sack costs less than ten dollars and lasts me all year. My favorite tubs are sold at Costco, in pairs. I like them because they are very clear and deep. The other necessary supplies are mealworm beetles, potatoes, carrots, apples, and yams.

To begin your own farm, you will need to get some beetles. Think of this part like sour dough starter. You just need to find someone with a mealworm farm, and they will be able to give you some beetles. Next, fill your tub with about six to eight inches of bran.

After your ranch is prepared, it is time to add the food. The worms will get their nutrition and hydration from the fruits and veggies that you provide. Their main diet needs to begin with raw potatoes sliced in half. This is where the beetles will feed and lay their eggs. The potatoes need to be placed, cut side down, on top of the bran.

Now, you can release the beetles. They will seek out the potatoes and begin to feed. Soon, they will lay eggs and then die. I remove the dead ones from the surface without disturbing the potatoes as the old ones begin to shrivel. Do not remove the shriveled potato pieces. This is where your hatchlings will be. After about a week, gently look underneath the oldest potatoes. You should see very tiny worms.

Unless you began your farm in order to get hundreds of wiggly little pets, it will soon be time to harvest. Prior to using your worms as food for other creatures, they need to be "gut loaded". This will make them more nutritious. This is done by offering other food besides the potatoes, such as apples, carrots, and yams. Be sure to remove any uneaten pieces often to prevent mold from entering your farm.

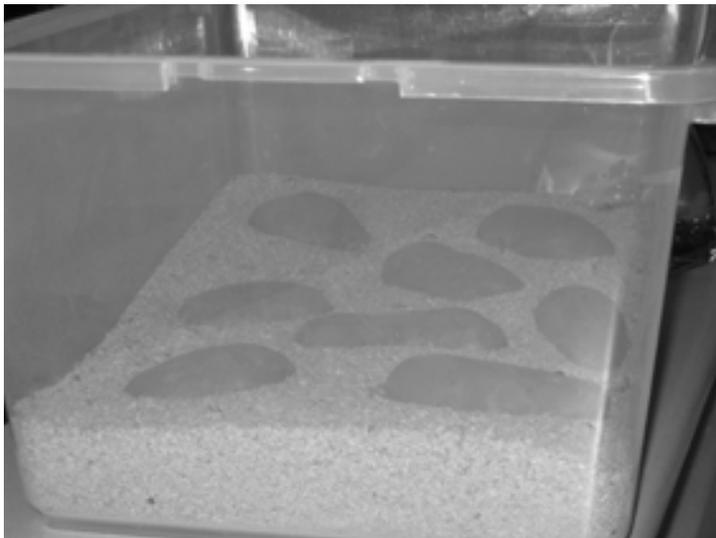
It is important not to over harvest your first crop if you wish to continue farming. As the worms mature, they will begin to look like little shrimp. This happens before they morph into beetles. The whole process only takes a few weeks. Ideally, you may want to set up more than one tub in order to maintain a large supply of worms. Two colonies will also provide you with many sizes of worms to choose from.

Unless you are a bug wimp, growing meal worms can be easy and fun. It will also save money and provide you with a convenient and nutritious supply of worms. Deciding how many worms to harvest and how many to let continue their life cycle will depend on your rate of usage. You may need to experiment a little in order to raise the correct number of worms for your needs. The rewards of being a mealworm farmer are worth a little trial and error.

Sliced potatoes nestled in bran is the beginning of your mealworm farm. Note the tiny specks of beetle in the bran.



A large, deep plastic bin makes the ideal mealworm farm.



Note: There are many different 'recipes' for growing mealworms. This one, from Lisa Limbert, has brought much success for our rehabbers. With the hot summer months in Arizona it is often difficult to obtain shipments of mealworms in good condition. The small investment of start up should reap excellent results with not too much effort. And your feathered friends will be delighted to have a constant supply of mealworms.