**SIMPLE RECIPE FOR JELLY WORMS FOR MASTER COMPOSTERS**

**(no worms were harmed during the development of this recipe)**

This is initially a disgusting concept, but actually is a pretty good way to get on friendly terms with real worms – you just can’t see them as gruesome after you have been knee-deep in the pink jelly variety for half an afternoon. The original idea was to hand out jars of edible worms in edible soil as the conclusion to a “Love Your Worms” section in a presentation, but it could also be a very amusing exercise with children: they would love squeezing jelly worms out of straws and seeing who can get the biggest, longest, wriggliest, and playing with the edible soil…..

**WORMS:**

**Ingredients:** two packets strawberry jelly (block type)

two sheets leaf gelatine

boiling water, cold water and milk/cream or soured cream

100 flexible plastic drinking straws, the sort with a corrugated “bend” near the top (any straw would do in theory, but the corrugated section creates the most realistic worm effect)

cylindrical waterproof container (vase, blender jar, or similar – even a fruit juice carton would do at a pinch, if you cut the top off)

piece of string

Prepare your straws:

* stretch out the corrugations (very satisfying)
* stack corrugated end downwards in cylindrical container (stop when they fit snugly, don’t risk squashing – my stick blender goblet takes about 80, and has a capacity of about 1 pint)
* tie with string to keep upright

Next mix your jelly:

* cut leaf gelatine into strips and soak in a small amount of cold water for five minutes.
* cut jelly blocks into small cubes, and dissolve in half a pint of boiling water.
* squeeze out gelatine and add to jelly, stirring briskly until dissolved
* top up with about ¼ pint milk/cream/soured cream for best colour effect and then make up to about 1 ¼ pints with cold water
* pour gently into the top of the bundle of straws until the liquid level reaches the top of the container; jiggle a bit to try to ensure that all straws are filled to this level, but don’t fuss

Put the straws in their container into the fridge overnight if possible. When ready for the worms, get a jug of hot water, pull out a couple of straws and dip them into it briefly, moving swiftly to a grease proof paper lined tray to catch the emerging worm. Take note of these tips!

* don’t leave them for more than a second or two in the hot water, or your worm will drop out and dissolve (don’t get too excited if you lose one or two, you will have plenty, and you will soon discover exactly how long it takes)
* if the worm doesn’t want to come out of the straw, squeeze the straw gently and slide your fingers down it to encourage him out
* the most realistic worm shapes are created if you let the emerging tail of the worm rest on grease proof paper on a large flat tray, so that he can coil into a wormy shape. Keep them separate as far as possible, otherwise you end up with a huge lump of worms (not the end of the world either, if space is limited)
* try to keep excess water off the tray if possible as it might dissolve the worms
* chill your tray of worms in the fridge until needed, but don’t freeze, as gelatine can break down in the freezer – equally important, remember that it returns to liquid if it gets too warm; don’t make them too far in advance, as they will slump, but overnight or even a couple of days ahead seems fine
* straws can be washed and saved for at least one re-use

**Hints:**

* you will soon be heartily sick of the smell and taste of block strawberry jelly, but it is the best colour (you could experiment with genuine fruit juices and increased gelatine – aim for double the strength they recommend on the packet)
* the milk/cream turns translucent jelly into a satisfactorily wormy opacity, but is not essential; a mixture of clear and opaque could be interesting, and poorly mixed milky jelly adds to the realistic effect
* short, broken and squashed worm bits are still very effective
* remember the end product is only jelly, and not the real thing – it can be easy to become slightly disgusted by this horrible quivering mass, but it’s a passing phase
* block jelly should be something like 40p per block; leaf gelatine is much dearer at about £2 for eight sheets. Straws are about £1 for 100. The milk/cream you probably have in your fridge anyhow. So your large batch of worms is only going to cost £1.30 plus £1.00 for straws which can be reused

**EDIBLE SOIL:**

**Ingredients:** Bourbon creams or similar all-chocolate cream biscuits

Break your biscuits into pieces and pulverise in a mini-chopper or foodprocessor. Half a packet produces enough edible soil to make the above quantity of worms convincing, but if you want more, just use the rest!

**Hints:**

* supermarket bourbon creams cost only something like 40p a packet; Oreo is about £1.20. If half a pack of the former is all that is needed, 20p is probably cheaper than the equivalent weight of commercial potting compost…
* you could of course make chocolate butter shortbread for a more gourmet touch, but no-one will know the difference

**PRESENTATION:**

* **basic:** sprinkle edible soil in a small, short jam jar with lid (reusable, recyclable, easy to transport in a cool box); add a few worms; dust the top with more edible soil – effective
* **more advanced:** pour a layer of chocolate mousse in the bottom of the jam jar; when set, add the soil-worms-soil as before, and then dust the top with chopped pistachio (about £2.00 a packet, half a packet is enough for the above quantities) as a nominal green layer in your compost bin
* **other ideas:** use to top cup cakes; scones; jam tarts; why not make a large chocolate cake, scoop out the middle and fill with worms and edible soil to make a charming surprise?
* **brilliant** if you can find mini ice cream ‘spades’ to supply for emptying your edible compost bin – birchwood ‘spades’ are about 5p each, minimum pack size 100 (Amazon – or sweet talk your local ice cream parlour) and are compostable