

## **Backyard Fish Bait**

### **Crickets & Earthworms**

#### **Raising Crickets**

##### **What kinds of crickets can be produced?**

Two species of crickets can be raised. One is the common black field cricket, and the other is the Australian grey cricket. The black variety may be obtained anywhere outdoors, while the grey is sold only through commercial dealers.

##### **What is the first step in cricket production?**

Obtain a container with a depth of 18 to 24 inches. This is the brood pen. Used "coffin-shaped" shipping crates make excellent brooder houses. Fill with about 5 inches of clean sand and moisten. Place five or six inches of wood excelsior to provide cover for the young crickets. Use insecticides carefully near your bait-raising site.

##### **How many crickets are stocked in each pen?**

Stock with 24 adult crickets (half females and half males) for each container up to two feet in diameter or length. Mature crickets have well developed wings, in contrast to wingless juveniles. Females may be distinguished from males by the presence of a long tube through which eggs are deposited extending from the posterior end.

##### **Is temperature a factor in cricket production?**

Yes. Crickets grow rapidly between 80 and 90 degrees F. In cool weather, this condition can be maintained with an electrical light bulb and a thermometer. Little growth occurs above 95 F. Containers will have to be covered to retain heat and prevent crickets from escaping. If no heat is needed, screen wire should be placed over the top.

##### **How fast do crickets grow?**

Eggs hatch in about 20 days after being laid and crickets reach maturity in two months.

##### **What food and water?**

Provide food in the form of chicken laying mash. Place it in a saucer with excelsior strewn around it, so that baby crickets may readily reach it. Provide water by using a glass drinking fountain similar to those used for watering chickens. Cotton is packed in the metal receptacle allowing crickets to obtain water by crawling up on the cotton.

##### **Won't crickets jump out?**

It is advisable to keep the pen covered and to wax the top 10 inches of the inside walls of the pen to prevent crickets from escaping.

##### **Is predation and disease a problem?**

Yes. Ants are natural enemies of young crickets. If the pen has legs, these should be placed in cans of oil or water to prevent ants from gaining access. Disease can best be controlled by using good hygiene practices. After a crop of crickets has been produced, it is best to clean the container and start over using fresh sand and excelsior.

#### **Raising Earthworms**

##### **What are the earthworm's requirements?**

Suitable soil, abundant food supply, moisture and temperature control.

##### **What type of soil is best?**

A combination of 1/3 peat, 1/3 black loam and 1/3 manure. Sandy soil should be avoided because it tends to injure the intestinal tract of earthworms. Manure can be of any domestic type, such as cattle manure.

##### **What food should be provided?**

Earthworms thrive best on a high fat, high protein diet, supplied by such foods as vegetable oil or lard mixed with corn, soybean, or cottonseed meal.

##### **How much and how often do you feed worms?**

For each bed 6'x3'x3, apply 1 1/2 pounds of shortening or lard mixed with 3 pounds of meal every two weeks. Used kitchen fats are a good source of shortening and lard. Mix the feed into the top 12 inches of soil in the bed.

##### **What about water?**

Moisture is added in the form of water as often as the worms are fed. If the bed is too dry, worms will be found at the bottom. If too wet, near the top. Adjust water supply so that worms are found throughout the top six or eight inches of soil.

##### **How is temperature controlled?**

This is difficult to do in a permanent outdoor bed. If worms are in some sort of portable containers, these can be moved into the garage on extremely cold nights when freezing temperatures are expected.

##### **How is a worm bed constructed?**

Use 2x10-inch pine or cypress boards nailed together to form a rectangle, or concrete blocks or bricks. Any length is satisfactory.

##### **Where should a worm bed be located?**

Any heavily shaded area is suitable. A roof may be provided over the bed for protection from sunlight and heavy rains.

##### **How many worms are stocked in each bed?**

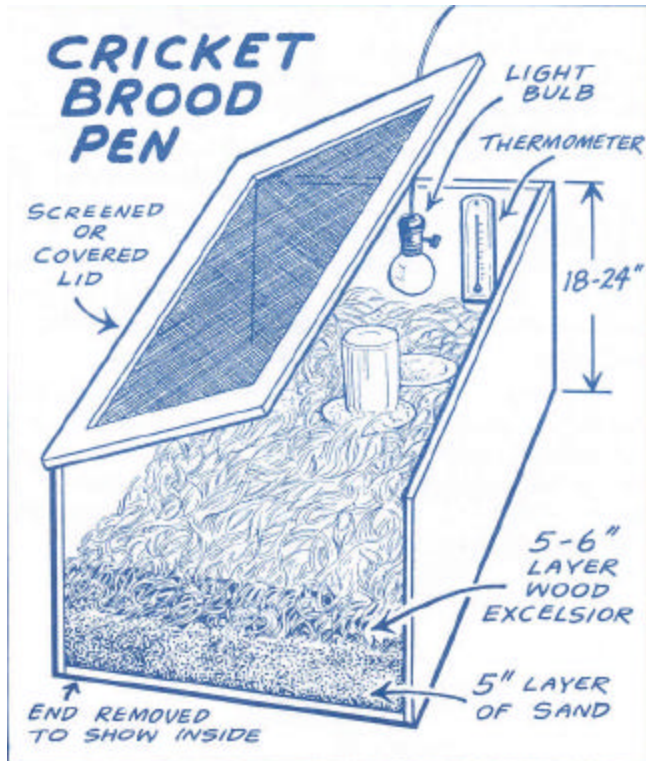
Stock the bed with 300 adult worms. Cover the bed with Spanish moss or burlap bags to prevent loss of moisture by evaporation and to provide protection from the sun. Considerable thinning of young worms is necessary to produce large individuals.

##### **How long does it take to produce a crop of worms?**

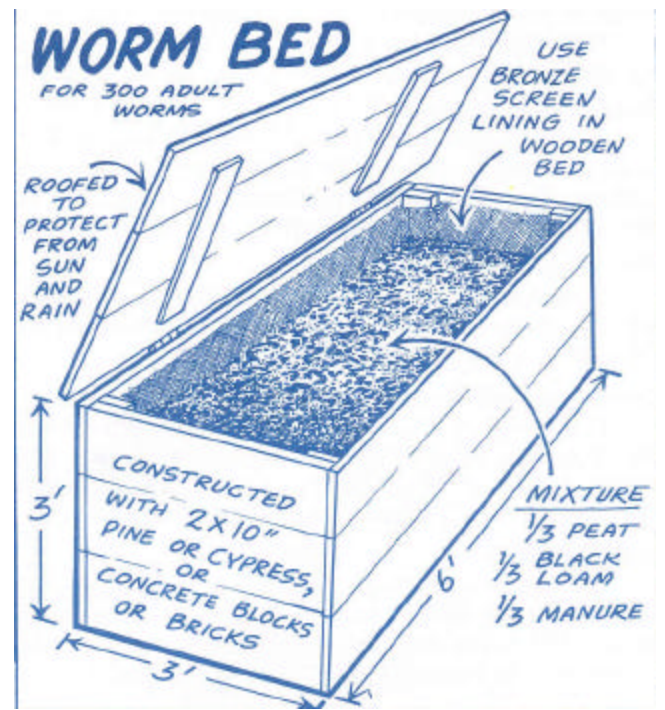
Within six months after stocking, worms can be removed from the beds.

##### **Can other worms be used?**

Other types of earthworms may be used in backyard bait raising. Some fishermen have been known to plant catalpa trees in the hopes that the tree will become naturally infested with catalpa worms (often pronounced "Catawba" or "Catalba" worms), which are the caterpillars of the Catalpa Sphinx moth.



The cricket brood pen should have a depth of 18 to 24 inches. Each pen should be up to two feet in diameter or length, and stocked with 24 adult crickets, half males, half females.



Worm beds can be portable, or located permanently in one spot. The bed shown in this illustration can be buried in the ground to a depth of about two feet. Beds should have a "roof" for protection from sun and rain.