

# Identifying the African Nightcrawler Composting Worm

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Vermicomposting is fun, challenging, and faster than hot composting. I compost with red wigglers, African Nightcrawlers, Alabama jumpers.

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*Identification and Care of the African Nightcrawler (eudrilus eugeniae)* | Source

## Overview of the African Nightcrawler

African nightcrawlers are one of the best choices for composting worms, if you can control their environment enough to keep them happy—they have specific temperature requirements. The scientific name for the African nightcrawler is *eudrilus eugeniae*. They reproduce very quickly, due to their quick maturity rate, compared to other composting worms, even the prolific red wiggler. They can be used for many different purposes, such as casting generation, organic waste disposal, and as bait for fishing.



*Very long African nightcrawler.*

## Identification of the African Nightcrawler

African nightcrawlers get very large, usually between 6 and 12 inches when fully grown (sometimes larger!). While they rival and sometimes exceed the Canadian and European nightcrawlers in length, they do not get a large in diameter as either species.

They have a distinct, raised clitellum/saddle similar to the red wiggler, but larger. Also similar to the red wiggler, they show banding when stretching out to move. The topside of the African nightcrawler is dark red to purple in color, with an iridescent sheen when exposed to light sunlight. The underside is a lighter pink/grey color. Their movement is relatively slow when held in hand, but very quick when moving through soil. They do not flail around as much as an Alabama jumper does when disturbed.

## Environment of the African Nightcrawler

African nightcrawlers like a moist environment, similar to every other composting worm. If you take a small handful of compost material and squeeze, a couple drops of water should be produced. If a lot more liquid comes out, add some dry material to help dry it out a little bit. If no water comes out, try adding some wet bedding. If it is time to feed, try adding wetter foods like melon. All my worms like corn cobs, which I break in half. I also throw the husks and silks in the bin as well.

However, the biggest difference between African nightcrawlers and other composting worms is their temperature requirements. They like it warm. About 75°F is optimal. They can survive as low as 60°F, and do fine in 90–95°F weather. Make sure they are in the shade most of the day. Like all composting worms, they dislike direct sunlight. They can survive through temporary cooler temperatures, as long as the soil they live in doesn't get too cold.

I am keeping my ANs in a large, opaque plastic bin, placing an old tablecloth over the top and loosely fitting the lid (do not snap shut). Very similar to the one used in the video just below. I also took a small nail and put liquid weeping holes on each side of the bin, preventing the bedding from getting too wet. Due to my bin being outside, I just let it drain into my lawn.

## Uses for African Nightcrawlers

In optimal conditions, an African nightcrawler can eat more than its body weight in food per day, making them great for disposing large amounts of kitchen waste. This makes them a great choice for people interested in decreasing the amount of trash that goes to the landfill.

If the intake is high, then the output is high as well, making them great for producing castings for a garden. I use their castings, which are very large in size compared to other worms, regularly to fertilize my plants. The castings hold a lot more water than the sand that makes up the majority of the central Florida environment where I live, making them a great amendment for improving water retention and drainage.

Due to their large size, African nightcrawlers make a good fishing worm. While no worm likes getting hooked, they are not as strong as the Alabama jumper. Due to their prolific nature, avid anglers can expect a steady supply of worms, once the colony is established. However, European or Canadian nightcrawlers tend to have thicker skin and are more substantial, and might be more appetizing to the fish. However, fish will even go after the much smaller red wiggler, so Africans are still a good choice.

## Peculiarities of the African Nightcrawler

African nightcrawlers tend to deposit their castings at the top of whatever container you are using. This makes them unsuitable for use as a single species for a flow-through bin. I am interested in trying to use them to try to use them in a multi-species flow-through bin, such as in conjunction with red wigglers or blues.

I cannot stress enough how much temperature control is important for African nightcrawlers. Unlike reds or the other nightcrawlers, who can tolerate 40–50°F, if African nightcrawlers get too cold, they will die off.

## To Sum Up

- African nightcrawlers are a great choice, because they are versatile.
- African nightcrawlers must stay warm, and will die if kept below 60°F for long periods of time.
- All worms need air circulation.
- All worms need a moist, but not overly wet, environment.
- Worms need bedding and food.

- Shredded newspaper and shredded cardboard are good choices for bedding.
- Most fruit and vegetable leftovers can go into the bin.
- Egg shells, coffee grounds/filter, and tea bags can go into bin.
- Avoid meats, cheese, fats, citrus, and pineapple.



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