

Earthworms are a gardener's best friend.

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**Earthworms are a gardener's best friend.**

**By Marilyn Pokorney**

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Research has shown that earthworm excrement, also called castings or vermicompost, improves the aeration, porosity, structure, drainage, and moisture-holding capacity of soil.

Many studies prove that when compared to conventional composts, vermicompost is less variable and much more stable. Mixing vermicompost into the planting medium essentially eliminated the need for additional fertilizer in the production of tomato plugs as one example.

Studies show that earthworm castings increase height, stem diameter, enhance root growth, increase dry weight, and produce more flowers per plant than peat moss.

Redworm castings are the richest and purest humus matter in the world. Humus is believed to aid in the prevention of harmful plant pathogens, fungi, nematodes and bacteria.

One pound of worms can convert one pound of pig manure into compost in 48 hours!

Worms consume three times their weight a week or more. Red wigglers are very active, reproduce quickly and consume their own body weight of waste every 24 hours. Therefore ten pounds of worms will eat ten pounds of waste in 24 hours!

Worm castings provide a rich source of a variety of essential plant nutrients.

Microbial activity in worm castings is 10 to 20 times higher than in the soil and organic matter that the worm ingests."

How to use worm castings:

When planting vegetable and annuals line the rows and holes with about two inches of castings. About every eight weeks side dress the plants with one-half cup of castings per plant or one cup per foot of row.

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For perennials work one-half cup of castings into the soil in the spring, middle of summer, and early fall.

For pots and hanging baskets add one-half inch castings to the top and water in. Then reapply every eight weeks.

Roses appreciate four cups of castings per plant.

If starting a new lawn add 15 pounds of casting per 100 square feet when sowing. Once established use seven pounds per 100 square feet.

For more information about vermicompost and castings visit:

<http://www.apluswriting.net/garden/earthworm.htm>

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## **Earthworms In The Garden / Earthworm Facts**

**By Francis Kilkelly**

Notice the lowly earthworm, squirming away, going about its everyday business. Simple creatures you may think but they have quite a important use in the garden. Did you know the earthworms are nature's first gardeners? They don't exist just for kids to eat and fishermen to use as bait :)

### **Some Basic Earthworm Facts**

Earthworms are present in almost every type of soil but the healthier the soil the greater the numbers. A healthy soil permits lots of air and moisture, both of which are needed by the earthworm for a continued existence. Earthworms have no lungs like you or me but instead breathe through their skin. Their whole skin absorbs oxygen and releases carbon dioxide. They also need moisture to assist them in respiration but too much moisture is not good for them.

There are four types of earthworm that you may run into:

Nightcrawlers: 8 to 10 inches long and the fisherman's favourite. Garden Worms: 5 to 7 inches long and found commonly in damp soils. Manure Worms: 4 to 5 inches long and found in manure rich soils. Red Worms: 3 to 4 inches long and the most commercially available.

Why Earthworms in the Garden?

Earthworms are a gardener's best friend.

A garden without earthworms would miss out on all of the great benefits that they bring to it. Their first job is to till the soil by tunneling through it. Tunnels created allow air and moisture to pass easily through the soil, creating a healthy environment for plants. Tunnels retain water that the plants can take up and also hold air to help bacteria break down organic matter within the soil.

After digestion earthworms produce excrement about the size of a pin head. This excrement is called "castings" or "vermicompost" and is an excellent soil conditioning material. It improves properties of the soil such as porosity and moisture retention, aids plant growth and helps in the fight against pests and diseases.

### Increasing Earthworm Population in the Garden

How does one go about increasing the number of earthworms in their garden soil? Well the best way to do so is to add more organic matter to the soil. Earthworms cannot get enough of the stuff and will seek it out wherever they can find it.

Finally...

The earthworm is just as important to the garden as the gardener that maintains it because they till the soil and add a soil conditioner in the form of castings. They are as much a gardener as you are. The next time you see one wiggling on the ground in front of you bend down and say "got any good gardening tips?" You never know it may answer :)

I will leave the final word to a one Charles Darwin who once had this to say about the earthworm:

"The plow is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before he existed, the land was in fact regularly plowed and still continues to be thus plowed by earthworms. It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world, as have these lowly organized creatures."

Francis Kilkelly runs one of the fastest growing home and garden communities at

<http://www.gardenstew.com/>

that has gardening forums and gardening blogs (

<http://www.gardenstew.com/blogs.php>

). Pop over to see what all the fuss is about. Original Article

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