

Wise up to WORMS

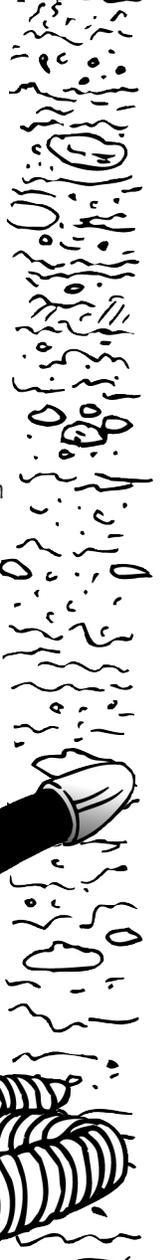
EXCUSE ME,
you're standing on
20 nematodes (microscopic parasites and predators),
200,000 algae (microscopic plants),
yards of fungi,
thousands of protozoa,
and up to a billion bacteria...
in 1 teaspoon of soil!



Healthy plants more easily resist pests. Good soil grows healthy plants. And earthworms help make good soil.

Earthworms are little "soil plows." They move bits of soil and make tunnels. This lets in air and water for animals and plants in the ground. Worms carry leaf bits and other materials into the soil, making it richer for plants. Earthworms eat soil and leave castings, little piles or pellets ("worm poop"). Castings hold nutrients that passed through the worm, and they improve the soil. Way to go, worms!

Why do you think robins tug so hard to pull earthworms from the soil?



Try This!

Worm - a - rama

A cool, moist day or evening is a great time to find earthworms. Look in garden soil, vacant lots, lawns, parks, or pastures.

1. Look at the soil surface. Castings are clues.
2. Dig a spadeful of soil. Sort through it for earthworms. Look at them through a hand lens. Look for:

- Setae** (bristles that help worms grip soil and crawl)
- Slime coating** (keeps skin moist so worms can breathe)
- Front end** (usually goes forward first)
- Clitellum** ("collar" or band that's only on adult worms)

3. After you study the worms, put them back on the soil, please.

Label the clitellum, setae, and front end.



Worms can turn your old food into plant food. Try vermicomposting (composting with worms). For tips on how to vermicompost, see: <http://www.niehhs.nih.gov/kids/worms.htm>

Tip for Grown-ups:
A healthy lawn always has critters that help keep pests under control!
Remember: Pesticides can kill the helpful critters that keep your soil healthy.

A baby robin will eat 14 feet of earthworms before it leaves the nest!