



Yes, Worms!

By Michael Davis

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

Now that spring has arrived and the sunny days of summer are soon to be here, many of us turn our thoughts to planting and growing in the home and garden. This means a journey to the local hardware store for potting soil, fertilizer and soil additives. But what if you could make your own super soil amendment at home and for almost free? Sound interesting? Then let's talk about Vermiculture, or the use of worms to naturally compost household wastes into arguably one of the best soil additives you can find.

That's right, I said worms! Those little red wriggly creatures so often seen in backyards across the county have the power to turn ordinary food scraps into super rich soil! But today, despite the popularity of backyard composting and yard waste pickup services, using worms at home to eat your garbage is a fringe endeavor at best. This is really unfortunate considering the low cost and ease to start this home recycling operation.

Earthworms and "friends" can process ½ their weight in waste per day and leave behind nutrient-rich, organic material. The worms' mouths are too small to ingest the waste so the process involves a multitude of organisms to achieve this, the worms being the largest and most visible. The worms' digestive system actually enriches the waste, after the other organisms break it down, adding calcite granules and friendly bacteria. In the ground, earthworms process the soil and organic matter and turn it into richer soil. In a home composter habitat, the worms and friends can do the same with kitchen scraps - taking a mix of vegetable and fruit trimmings, along with paper and other filler, and turning it into black, sweet, earthy-smelling castings. Ok, ok, some would call it worm poop but the stuff is really, really good for plants.

05-02-2018

Now, before you start tilling your garbage into your backyard, let's discuss the correct way to set up your own worm habitat. You can find ready-made worm bins online but you can DIY-it! Designs are plentiful on the internet, one from Oregon State University is easy to build from items found at most hardware stores for about \$45. Follow this link [extension.oregonstate.edu/lincoln/sites/default/files/diy\\_worm\\_bin.oscr2011.pdf](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/lincoln/sites/default/files/diy_worm_bin.oscr2011.pdf).

Once you have a home for the worms, where do you get them? No, don't dig up your yard - although those worms are good for the soil - they probably aren't the right species. You want Red Wigglers, or, as those in the worm business call them, *Eisenia fetida* for your composter. Again, the internet is a source of compost worms but why not find a local source and spare the environment the packaging from shipping. (Of course, the worms and friends could eat the cardboard box they came in.)

Another consideration is if you live in an apartment or home without a space for regular composting, vermiculture is perfect since it doesn't take up much room, doesn't stink and does this at room temperature.

Interested? Want to learn more? Join UCCE Master Gardeners Cindy, Merry, and Gail on Saturday, May 5, at El Dorado County Government Center, Building C – Hearing Room, 2850 Fairlane Ct in Placerville, 9:00 am – noon, for our free class, Making Worms Work for You. A limited supply of worm bins will be available for purchase.

A new class is being offered on Wednesday, May 9 on the challenging subject of caring for plants out of their natural habitat - Houseplants. Join us 9:00 a.m. – noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Dr, Cameron Park.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.