

Boulder Worms February 1, 2009

Welcome to the second issue of Boulder Worms, a newsletter for vermicomposters around Boulder and the front range. I'm planning for this to be a monthly newsletter.

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You can also find most of the content in this newsletter on my blog:
<http://vermicomposting.wordpress.com/>

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----- LOCAL COMPOSTING CONFERENCE

The third annual Rocky Mountain Compost School is happening in Fort Collins, Colorado. It is hosted by Colorado State University's Department of Soil and Crop Sciences. It is from April 14 to April 17, and the focus is "classroom and field instruction for large-scale composters highlighting issues of local and national interest". The cost is \$495, but scholarships are available. You must return the application form (<http://www.rmcs.colostate.edu/ScholarshipApplication.pdf>) by Mar 14th to be considered. Must more information is at their website (<http://rockymountaincompostschool.info/>).

According to the organizer I contacted, Will Brinton will be the headliner. Mr Brinton runs a company that specializes in "in testing soils, plants, organic wastes and agrichemicals" according to his website (<http://www.woodsend.org/about.html>). He is also a member of the Soil Science Society. Here's an excerpt from a paper of his: "Science, Sustainability and Organic Practice: Organic Farming in the Sound-Byte Age" (<http://www.biotech-info.net/MSU-org.pdf>)

"Nature is crisscrossed with communicativeness, but not of our type, certainly not digital or electronic. Nature's web of communication is not even remotely similar to the modern information web. We haven't the faintest idea how it works, either. This web of nature encompasses a vast system of organic compounds, bacteria, fungi and macrofauna, all the way up to the animal kingdom and excepting us (evidence somehow that we are not animals, at least not any more). With each new report on interactions and communicativeness within these vast kingdoms, one is more likely to be convinced that our Promethean manner of manipulating nature is terribly off the mark- somehow based on an incorrect set of premises."

Hands on compost experiments will take place on the worm farm of John Anderson (<http://www.greenheartguide.org/node/237>). The organizer I talked to also stated that, while the agenda was not finalized, this year's conference would be much like last year. Below are session titles that look that looked interesting, pulled from last year's agenda:

- * Colorado Regulations for Compost Facilities
- * Odor Management
- * Vermicompost Systems
- * Case Study: Compost Utilization in Turf
- * Compost Economics

Looks pretty interesting to me, and I'm sure the networking will be great too.

TEMPERATURE CONTROL FOR AN OUTSIDE WORM BIN

As I'm sure you noticed, Boulder had a crazy January in weather terms (<http://www.wunderground.com/history/airport/KBJC/2009/1/31/MonthlyHistory.html#calendar>). We had a week of 60s and 70s followed by three days where the high was below freezing. I have an outside bin, so I depend on my redworms being insulated by the mass of bedding, or being able to retreat into the ground if they need to. I lost a worm bin a few years ago by when we had a similar cold snap and my bin was not well insulated or connected to the earth.

I interviewed a pair of novice worm keepers this fall. They had a standalone bin that was not connected to the ground (<http://vermicomposting.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/p1000526.jpg>). Among other things, we discussed what they planned to do when winter came, including my call for a worm temperature website, a plan to incorporate a solar panel and resistive heating element to help maintain desirable temperatures. Below is an excerpt:

Dan: [The bin is] on your patio right now, and you moved it from the shade where it was most of the summer into the sun, and you insulated it?

Linda: It was always insulated.

Dan: OK, you insulated the top more?

Linda: We insulate the top at night.

Dan: Oh, just at night?

Linda: So what we've been doing if it is sunny out is leaving this [the top] open during the day, just letting it really heat up, and then at night we've been taking this extra piece of insulation and putting it on top. We've noticed that the temperature...

Dan: Oh, you have a thermometer?

Linda: Yes.

Mark: It's good for about ten degrees.

Linda: Yes, it seems it's been ten degrees, but we're only measuring air temperature, we don't have a soil thermometer yet.

Dan: Sure. So it's probably warmer in the soil.

Linda: Yes.

Mark: We'd like to think that it's warmer in the soil.

Linda: I'm sure that it is.

Mark: The insulation sits up here, so this is dead air. So, in theory, eventually it should equalize with whatever the soil temperature is.

Linda: No, it stays quite a bit warmer in the soil.

Dan: How do you know it is good to ten? I mean, we haven't had a ten degree day?

Linda: No, no no, it's a ten degree difference.

Dan: Oh, ok, a ten degree difference.

Linda: So if it is 34 outside, it is 44 inside. So the air temperature tends to

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stay about ten degrees warmer. I suspect that the soil temperature is staying quite a bit warmer than that.

Dan: Sure, so you guys are planning to get a soil thermometer?

Linda: Yes.

Dan: Ok, wow, are you going to put this on a website somewhere, so people can monitor the worm bin's temperature from anywhere in the world.

Linda: I'll let you know what Mark's plan is for the winter, if we don't move it into the garage, or even if we do move it into the garage. He has this idea of perhaps putting a little solar panel on top, and then.... why don't you describe? Some kind of heater inside?

Mark: A resistive element. You'd want to set it up so obviously it didn't catch fire. But I think a ten watt panel, maybe twenty watt panel, either hooked up on the fence and then wired in, or we just simply have the panel sitting up. Because we get good sun in the wintertime here, and recline it back at a 45 degree angle there. We'd get power off it for six to eight hours a day and we would dump that power through a resistive element. If we wanted to get really fancy, we have it on a timer so that it actually feeds a battery during the day and then complete the circuit at night, from 8:00 o'clock at night to eight the next morning, it's drawing power off the battery.

Dan: That's very cool.

Mark: And then it repeats itself on a timer

Linda: It's just kind of an idea. I don't think it's been implemented yet.

Dan: It seems like moving it to the garage might be an easier solution, but that would definitely be cooler.

Linda: Well if you saw our garage....

Dan: If you're talking about that large of amount of dirt that's not an insignificant amount of weight to move too, right?

Linda: It's very heavy.

Mark: It's heavy, I mean you can slide it on the deck easily with one person, but it would take two of us to actually, you know, move it into the garage. The garage would be safest because our garage is insulated and the temperature never drops below freezing there and Mother Nature and the worms do the rest.

----- THANKS

Thanks for reading! I am just starting this newsletter, so any comments or suggestions are welcome. Feel free to reply to this email or contact me using this form: <http://vermicomposting.wordpress.com/about/>

Until next time,

Dan Moore
<http://vermicomposting.wordpress.com/>

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