

Boulder Worms September 2, 2009

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You can also find most of the content in this newsletter on my blog:

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----- WIKIPEDIA AND VERMICOMPOSTING

I strongly encourage you to visit the Wikipedia page on vermicomposting ( <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermicompost> ). Go ahead, I'll wait. Isn't that cool? So much information packed into one page.

One of the things I love about worm keeping is that it is such a hands on experience. Are you curious if worms like cabbage? How about carrot tops? Rotten apples? The answer is try it, if you have the room in your bin. This culture of experimentation is prevalent everywhere I look in the worming community.

However, a lot of the knowledge people have is locked up, in mailing lists and on the web. And, if a newcomer looks for advice on the web, they can find all kinds of crazy conflicting advice. I've seen all kinds of sites advocating all kinds of often conflicting practices. And you don't know if someone running a site is just out to make a quick buck or not, which adds to the confusion.

This is where Wikipedia comes in. It can serve as a jumping off point, with references to other blogs and papers. The Wikipedia article is already the top result for 'vermicomposting' on google. But the best part is that you can edit the article yourself. Notice an incorrect fact? See a typo? Found an article that explains an aspect of worm keeping? Have a great picture of your bin? Add it to the wikipedia article, and keep pushing the knowledge of worm keeping forward.

Note, please be aware that you shouldn't put links to your own blog posts on Wikipedia; it's bad form to do so. I did this, until someone else removed them. And that brings up another point—editors and writers on Wikipedia can be a bit brusque, so be prepared with a thick skin. Here's the Wikipedia manual of style to get your editing started on the correct path ( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Manual\\_of\\_Style](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Manual_of_Style) ).

----- THE EARTH MOVED BOOK REVIEW

"The Earth Moved: On the Remarkable Achievements of Earthworms", by Amy Stewart, ( <http://astore.amazon.com/vermandvermin-20/detail/1565124685> ) is 200 pages of fun for any home worm keeper. While Stewart's home worm keeping, including her own journey and experiences, inform the book and pop up throughout the text, the focus is larger. Starting with Darwin, Stewart covers a broad swath of worm science. The writing is easy to follow, refreshing, and interesting. At least if you're interested in worms. However, as the subtitle indicates, if you aren't already, you may be amazed by what they can do! These lowly creatures, with hardly any organs at all, are responsible for creating soil. And, as the book *Dirt* showed ( <http://bouldervermicomposting.com/2008/12/31/book-review-dirt/> ), soil is the foundation of human civilization.

Stewart does a great job of describing some of the characters in the world of worms. Sam Jones ( [http://www.nhm.ku.edu/inverts/sam\\_james/](http://www.nhm.ku.edu/inverts/sam_james/) ) started out studying grasslands, but ended up "one of the world's leading earthworm taxonomists". Exotic species of worms are now his passion, to the point of creating a "Worms of the Philippines" poster (I searched for this online, but was unable to find a reference). She also goes to Ohio and talks to Clive Edwards ( <http://entomology.osu.edu/personnel/single.asp?strid=180> ), a professor who's done a lot of experiments on the efficacy of worm castings. Edwards on vermicompost: "We found that 2 to 4 tons [of worm castings] per acre [of cornfield] increased yields, and also reduced crop loss due to disease and damaged fruit. Not only that but there was a residual benefit that lasted up to four years." Scott Subler, a former coworker of Edwards, founded a worm composting company, which unfortunately doesn't appear to be around anymore. He is interviewed talking about vermicomposting dairy cow manure with an industrial grade worm "reactor". He has even "gone on QVC to sell his product and spread the message about the benefits of worm castings". Subler has found that "the inputs [to vermicomposting] are not the problem... It's the output that's a problem"; that has certainly been what I've found in my readings on large-scale vermiculture.

I don't want to give the impression that Stewart focuses on people entirely. On the contrary, each chapter is devoted to a specific aspect of worm knowledge or history. She discusses the business of raising worms for sale, spends a page or two on the biological history of worms, writes about how she harvests and uses her worm castings, and covers different types of worms. She even talks about the difference between red wigglers and redworms (they're different species). Stewart even visits a sewage plant in California, where her uncle is working on a pilot project to use worms to process biosolids (I didn't see any mention of vermicomposting on the facility website ( [http://www.cityofpacific.org/depts/wwt/caleracreek/about\\_the\\_facility.asp](http://www.cityofpacific.org/depts/wwt/caleracreek/about_the_facility.asp) ) so I guess the pilot project didn't work out).

Stewart's book covers wide ground, from Darwin's studies of worms to modern use of worms as biodetectors, from giant worms in Australia to the destruction of the Minnesota forests, due to non-native worms (more on that here ( <http://bouldervermicomposting.com/2009/01/22/invasive-earthworms-paper/> ) ). She also has a very useful epilogue where she discusses how to get started keeping worms, a two-page bibliography full of interesting books that talk about worms, and an appendix full for resources, from newsletters to websites to worm bins. The book was published in 2004, but many of the resources listed are still around.

All in all, a fantastic, fun book. I couldn't put it down until I finished it.

----- THANKS

Thanks for reading! Any comments or suggestions are welcome. Feel free to reply to this email or

contact me using this form: <http://bouldervermicomposting.com/contact/>

Until next time,

Dan Moore

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