

To: WormEzine list  
Subject: WormEzine Vol. 3, No. 2, March-April 2004

News and information from Mary Appelhof  
about vermicomposting, worms, and other critters that live in the soil.

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For the Small Print, scroll to end.

They laughed when I said worms eat my garbage,  
but I showed them how, and now thousands say the same thing

A WORD FROM MARY APPELHOF aka Worm Woman

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(NOTE: I got to Russia before I got this out! I had most of it ready before I left, but still had finishing touches to put on. Sorry for the long delay. Glean what you want out of this one, and I'll talk about Russia next time.)

Where did February go? Even with an extra day, it got away from me before I could get my WormEzine out. So this March-April WormEzine is number 2 for this year. I just keep plugging away. I have my visa and leave for Russia in 10 days; things are getting close to the wire for my 2 1/2 week trip. I won't be completely among strangers—Clive Edwards, Sun Zhenzhun (from China), and Svetlana Maksimova (from Belarus) will be there. They all came to the Vermillennium, as well. A couple of days after I get back I'll be going up north here in Michigan to give a presentation to community college biology teachers at Higgins Lake.

I took the train down to Springfield, Illinois, where I presented at the first Vermicomposting Symposium sponsored by the Illinois Dept. of Commerce, Dept. of Agriculture, City of Springfield, and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance and coordinated by Brett Ivers. It was a good symposium. . . one of those events that exploded from 25 or so registrants two weeks before, to 100 the day of the conference.

Now that we've completed the George Chan series in Integrated Farming Systems I'm picking up on my West Coast Tour last fall. Maybe it will give you some ideas about whether you would like to go to the Vermico seminar and/or Bioneers next year. It always helps to plan

ahead!

Lots of press about worms and vermicomposting these days, much of it happening because Amy Stewart's new book on earthworms is out and getting numerous and favorable reviews. I'm reviewing "The Earth Moved: On the remarkable achievements of earthworms" here, and we are also carrying it, so you are welcome to order it from us:

[http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/The\\_Earth\\_Moved\\_On\\_the\\_Remarkable\\_Achievements\\_.html](http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/The_Earth_Moved_On_the_Remarkable_Achievements_.html)

Just think, I will have traveled about 15,000 miles before I talk with you again! Hard to imagine, isn't it?

Mary Appelhof

Changing the way the world thinks about garbage

CONTENTS of this issue

1. Feature
2. Review
3. Notable Bits
4. Q&A
5. Coming Events
6. Product Highlights: The Earth Moved
7. About the Author
8. The Small Print

1=====FEATURE=====

### What Draws Me to the West Coast in the Fall

I live in the Midwest. As a resident of Michigan my home is about an hour's drive from Lake Michigan, whose shoreline is part of what is sometimes known as the Fourth Coast. When most people think about coastal areas in the United States, the East, West, and Gulf Coasts come first to mind. But the Fourth Coast is actually the longest continuous coastline in the U.S. It extends 5000 miles as the waters of the St. Lawrence River and the five Great Lakes--Erie, Ontario, Huron, Superior and Michigan--lap the coastal shores. One of my favorite pastimes, too rarely enjoyed, is to go to Lake Michigan and watch the sunset over the water, land at my back, my feet in the sand, and wind in my hair. I particularly like the times when the waves are large and booming, with the light shining through the breaking surf giving a magical translucence to the ever-changing curve of the wall of water. The West Coast gives me a similar and familiar feeling. Only the water tastes salty. And the waves are bigger.

Each fall for the past four years I have gone on a West Coast tour, starting out with the Vermico Seminar in Portland, Oregon. Pete Bogdanov puts on this intensive 2-day event, Best Management Practices in Vermicomposting Management, which he designed to meet the needs of those who want to know about the business aspects of vermicomposting and vermiculture. Attracting from 70-100 attendees each year, this seminar is ambitious in content, covering basic composting--both process and product-- biology and ecology of earthworms, vermicomposting

process and product, marketing, and financing. Since there isn't time to cover everything during the sessions, the 420+ page manual goes into more detail and addresses topics such as site design, operations, business plan, and regulations. With a resource section, and an amazing glossary, the manual itself is a necessary document in the library of anyone in the worm business.

Initially, Pete Bogdanov and Kelly Slocum delivered most of the content, but in recent years Pete has made room for amazingly diverse and knowledgeable guest speakers, and I am delighted to have been included. We've had the privilege of hearing from Dr. Scott Subler, Jim Jensen, Dan Holcomb, Dr. Elaine Ingham, George Hahn, Jay Mertz, Jack Chambers, and others. In fact, Pete's seminar serves as the one opportunity for recognized leaders in the vermicomposting industry to get together, catch up on each other's recent work, find out the hot topics, review the latest research, and generally feel the pulse of the industry. To reinforce this networking, Pete also offers a reduced rate for returnees, who come for the new information and networking.

This year's seminar will be Oct. 8-9, 2004, in Portland, Oregon, and I encourage any of you who are in the worm business or who want to be in the business to attend. For more information, visit <http://www.vermico.com> LATE BREAKING NEWS: SEMINAR CANCELLED FOR THIS YEAR.

Another draw for me to go to the West Coast is the Bioneers Conference that is held in San Rafael, California. Billed as "Revolution from the Heart of Nature," Bioneers stands for biological pioneers—people who forge ahead, often on the edge, using principles of biology and biological organisms to create positive change. Kenny Ausubel founded Bioneers in 1990. When I first met him and his wife, Nina Simons, and learned about the organization and conference they put on every year, I realized that I have been a Bioneer since I started my work with worms. They saw this, too, and invited me to give a workshop at the 2001 conference. From then on, I was hooked on Bioneers. Such incredible energy among the 3000 participants and speakers! Every year since then I have come home totally inspired. I bring home audiotapes and books that keep me listening and reading for the rest of the year. One year I heard Lynn Margulis and came home with "Microcosmos." She is the one who taught me that it was bacteria that learned how to free up oxygen in our environment. She also wrote "The Five Kingdoms" book that was the bane of my existence during my ZERI training.

This past year it is Paul Stamets, the mushroom guru who inspires me more every time I listen to his tapes. I'm reading his "Mushroom Cultivator" book now and wish there was a book that gave comparable information about raising worms. Culture techniques, environmental variables including even carbon dioxide concentrations to stimulate production of fruiting bodies, pathogens, analyses of substrate, protein content of mushrooms. I know a lot about worms, and I know many of the people who have spent much of their lives working with worms. But I can't think of anyone who could write the book Paul has written, but with earthworms as the subject. Bioneers this year is Oct. 15-17. I expect to be there, and you can find out more by going to their website: <http://www.bioneers.org>

With time in between Vermico and Bioneers, I can spend time with friends, and this past year was particularly enjoyable as I drove down the Oregon Coast with Nancy Noyce who attended the Vermico seminar. The photos you can see on my website at <http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/wormezine.html>

show a rather mystic inland estuary near Tillamook and the rugged shoreline of the Oregon Coast. Nancy also drove me up to Crater Lake, a place I had seen gorgeous photographs of, but had never really expected to see. It was a picture-postcard day, with a bright blue sky intensifying the brilliant, deep blue of the 1500 ft deep lake.

I had more good company when Midori Egi drove me from San Francisco to Point Reyes National Seashore just north of SF. Midori translated both my book “Worms Eat My Garbage” and Binet Payne’s “The Worm Café” to Japanese. Midori has been vermicomposting for most of the 11 years she has lived in the United States, and as a free-lance translator selects books to translate that she already enjoys. With those credentials, of course she makes good company! Lauri Sturdivant, local recycling coordinator who does a radio show on their community station, taped our conversation with questions from the group who came to meet me at the Point Reyes Station bookstore. Midori and I were guests of Trish, an avid gardener who had her own worm bins sitting out on the patio. Trish’s technique is to use one bin, fill it up, and then move to the second bin while the first bin finishes up and stabilizes. I found the raspberry patch in the back garden and ate an apple or two from the old but rejuvenated apple orchard on the way to the hot tub. Did Midori ever love the hot tub! Of course, I wasn’t going to make her use it by herself!

And then. . . we got to play! For the next two days Midori and I enjoyed Point Reyes Peninsula. As we drove past the dairies and oyster farm out to the lighthouse the first day we listened to a tape giving oral histories of the cattle ranches on Point Reyes. The next day we went in the other direction listening to the other side of the tape and became thoroughly engrossed in the history of how the environmentalists and cattle ranchers finally began working together to save the peninsula from proposed developments of over 50,000 homes. We learned how the grass on the hills on a Thursday could become butter on the tables of people in San Francisco the following Sunday. We saw Tule Elk on the hills at Tomales Point and walked the narrow, rocky half-mile path down to McClure’s beach, a wonderful, sandy beach. Ahh! Those magnificent waves. The warm sand (and cold water!). The rocky cliffs behind us. The gulls flying just out of reach. I took a nap on the beach relishing the fresh air, warm sun, and comforting and rhythmic sound of the waves pounding on the shore. Visit <http://www.nps.gov/pore/home.htm> to learn more about Point Reyes. When you go, don’t limit your stay to just one day. . . there is far too much to enjoy!

At another time I’ll move on down the California coast . . . San Jose, Moro Bay, Santa Monica, and Del Mar Fairgrounds. And, yes, there will be something about worms in every location!

2=====REVIEW=====

The Earth Moved:  
On the Remarkable Achievements of Earthworms  
By Amy Stewart

It has been twenty-seven years since publication of a good book on earthworms targeted for a general audience. But Jerry Minnich’s “The Earthworm Book,” (Rodale Press, 1977 didn’t come close to capturing the excitement and tenderness and inquisitiveness about earthworms that Amy Stewart does in her recent book, “The Earthworm Moved: On the Remarkable Achievements of Earthworms” (Algonquin Press, 2004).

Amy Stewart is a gardener who tends her current garden in northern California. She

couldn't miss the fact that “. Gardeners and earthworms work in tandem, tilling the soil, feeding the plants.” As she began investigating habits of earthworms, she soon realized that earthworms hold the key to most of what happens underground. She shares her findings in a captivating and engaging manner.

Do you remember the first time you held a worm in your hand? I don't. Amy does. It had come out of the worm bin on her back porch she had been keeping for years. She would deposit her kitchen scraps where, she says, “The worms are so thick they look like ground beef set in motion, a mass of churning bodies.” But in all those years, she had never held a worm.

The worm Amy held and described becomes a part of the historical record alongside the work of Charles Darwin written a country and a quarter earlier. A major strength of Amy's work is the way she presents, and describes Darwin's 40-year passion for studying earthworms. She entwines her observations with his, and brings again to the fore the meticulous care Darwin took in, for example, cutting tiny triangles of paper and recording the number of times earthworms dragged the narrower end into their burrow.

Amy sought and gained access to leading worm scientists of today's oligochaetologists, she calls them, although I suspect most of them don't call themselves that.

She talked worm taxonomy with Sam James, no-till agriculture with Clive Edwards, worms as invasive species with Lee Frelich and Cindy Hale. She learned about Oregon's giant worm species from Dorothy McKey-Fender and her son, William Fender. Amy didn't go on a dig for the Giant Gippsland Earthworm of Australia (I did, and it was amazing), but she talked to John Matthews, owner of the Giant Worm Museum in Korumburra who said they haven't been able to keep specimens alive in captivity. Amy did visit a site in California that is using worms as part of a project to treat sludges from wastewater treatment.

Did Amy interview me? Yes. By phone. (After all, she has her own worm bin, why come here?). Amy describes comparing notes with her friends about their small-scale worm bins, saying she hardly thinks having a bin on the back porch is unusual. “. . . But in fact,” she says, “the idea is fairly new. Thirty years ago there were very few guidebooks and no commercially manufactured bins. All that changed when Mary Appelhof . . . published a brochure on the subject and sold it to anyone who would send a quarter and self-addressed, stamped envelope. By 1982, that brochure had evolved into ‘Worms Eat My Garbage,’ a book that is now the classic how-to guide for home worm composters.” Amy and I obviously have our own mutual admiration society.

In “The Earth Moved,” Amy Stewart brings to the layperson what I believe to be the most significant book on earthworms to come out in over a century. Her writing is engaging, accurate, personal, and fun. Recommend it.

Mary Appelhof

3=====NOTABLE BITS=====

WORMS EAT MY GARBAGE REVIEWED IN MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

Now in its revised second edition, “Worms Eat My Garbage,” by Mary Appelhof is a practical and “user friendly” guide to recycling kitchen food waste, producing fertilizer for house and garden plants, growing fishing worms, and saving money. All through the process of a worm composting system, “Worms Eat My Garbage” is a simple, effective, “how-to” guide covering

everything from how to set up a worm bin, to what types of garbage are best for worm composting, to taking care of the worms, to effectively saving money while reaping the benefits of the process. "Worms Eat My Garbage" is easy-to-follow, thorough, and enthusiastically recommended reference for environmentalists and gardeners. Midwest Book Review, January, p7, column 3.

See this review and others at <http://www.midwestbookreview.com>

4=====Q & A=====

Dear Margie and Carol,

Thank you for your email asking for advice about starting and setting up a worm composting business. My book will give you basic information about worm composting, but it is not designed to help people get started in the business. It may be easy to get started in the worm business, but it isn't necessarily easy to make money in it. It helps to know something about running a business, a lot about composting, handling materials efficiently, marketing, the situation in your own country/community regarding regulation of handling wastes (resources).

If you were in Africa, I would certainly plan to obtain worms from Africa. I encourage you to contact Ina Meyer at [inameyer@absamail.co.za](mailto:inameyer@absamail.co.za). She has been working with vermicomposting for a number of years in South Africa and may be able to help you find a source of worms.

Meantime, there are lots of postings on the Worm Digest Forum from people who discuss setting up a business using worms. . . they usually recommend starting small, learning the ropes, getting a feel for the organisms, not spending a lot of money at first. We have the book "Commercial Vermiculture"

([http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman\\_catalog\\_Commercial\\_Vermiculture\\_23.html](http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman_catalog_Commercial_Vermiculture_23.html)) It will set out the parameters you need to consider. Spend some time, use the Internet, and sift out what seems like good information from the bad. Good luck.

Sincerely,

Mary Appelhof

5=====COMING EVENTS=====

A. MARCH IS SMALL PRESS MONTH. The Small Press Center and Publishers Marketing Association (PMA) are joining together to create the 8th annual month-long promotion of independent publishers. The theme for 2004 is "Let Every Voice Be Heard! Support America's Independent Small Publishers." One of the highlights of the month will be the second annual "How to Get Published Day", taking place on March 4th, 2004. Additional support has been provided by Book Sense and the American Booksellers Association, Consortium Book Sales & Distribution, Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, Independent Publishers Group, National Book Network/Biblio, Publishers Group West, R.R. Bowker, SCB Distributors, and Small Press Distribution. For information call 212-764-7021 or visit <http://www.smallpress.org>

A. MARCH 17-20, VLADIMIR, RUSSIA. EARTHWORMS AND SOIL FERTILITY. Sponsored by the Interregional Scientific Practical Corporation "PIK" Ltd.

Russian Academy of Agriculture, Vladimir Scientific Institute of Investigations in Agriculture, Vladimir State Pedagogical University and Vladimir State University, and Vladimir Region Administration and Department of Agriculture. This will be the 2nd International Scientific Practical Conference.

The scientific programmed of the conference includes plenary, sectional and stand reports on the following problems:

- biology and selection of destructors (microorganisms and earthworms) of organic wastes and environmental pollution;
- methods of composting and vermicomposting of organic wastes;
- industrial technologies of composting and vermicomposting of organic wastes;
- production of ecologically pure organic fertilizers;
- production and application of humic substances in agriculture;
- increase of soil's fertility and production of ecologically pure agricultural crop yields;
- restoration of polluted soils with microorganisms and earthworms;
- biotechnologies of food additives and bioactive substances production.

Time is getting short to obtain the necessary letter of invitation and obtain a visa from the Russian Embassy. Contact Dr. Igor Titov for further information. [ic\\_pic@port33.ru](mailto:ic_pic@port33.ru)

B. MARCH 29-MAY 16, 2004. ECOVERSITY offers a ZERI course: FROM TRASH TO TREASURE. ZERI-Certified Practitioners Margo Covington, Lynda Taylor, Miguel Santistevan, and Dick White are offering this 8-week course, which they describe as an exciting approach to "treasure hunts" from what we're throwing away. Rather than seeing trash as an expense or a problem, filling up landfills or leaching into groundwater, you'll learn how to see treasure that can provide and exceed basic human needs, while also enhancing the environment and natural resources, and generating local business opportunities. Participants in this course will learn the basics of the ZERI approach. Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA Call (505) 424-9797 or go to: [HYPERLINK "http://www.ecoversity.org"](http://www.ecoversity.org)  
<http://www.ecoversity.org>

E. MAY 17, 2004. Amy Stewart to be on Diane Rehm show. National Public Radio stations, regular broadcast time for your area.

6. =====PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS=====

AMY STEWART'S NEW BOOK: THE EARTH MOVED: On the remarkable achievements of earthworms.

We're so convinced you will want to add Amy Stewart's new book to your own library of earthworm books we have them in stock. You can order from us at: <http://www.wormwoman.com/> Amy is doing lots of interviews and book signings, mostly in her home state of California, but she did a delightful radio interview at Prairie Lights bookstore in Iowa City with Dr. Sam James joining her to talk about worms. You can hear them both on the web at [http://wsui.uiowa.edu/prairie\\_lights.htm](http://wsui.uiowa.edu/prairie_lights.htm) Go down to the April 7, 2004 broadcast and you can download the interview. Amy is also scheduled to do an interview on the Diane Rehm show on NPR on May 17, 2004. Way to go, Amy! What an honor! We'll be tuned in!

7=====ABOUT THE AUTHOR=====

Mary Appelhof is founder and president of Flowerfield Enterprises, which

develops and markets educational materials on vermicomposting. Its publishing imprint is Flower Press, publisher of the how-to book Worms Eat My Garbage, the classroom activity book and curriculum guide, Worms Eat Our Garbage: Classroom Activities for a Better Environment, The Worm Cafe: Mid-scale vermicomposting of lunchroom wastes, and Diabetes at 14: Choosing tighter control for an active life, which is not about vermicomposting, but is an invaluable asset for anyone affected by diabetes.

8===== THE Small PRINT=====

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