

## **WormEzine Vol. 3, No. 4,**

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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Dear Worm Workers,

Here it is almost November. Time for the elections. The trees have turned and dropped many of their leaves. It's time to put the worm bin to bed for the winter. But it's also my chance to chat with you a bit and bring you up to date on what's been happening in my worm world.

The big news is that I have negotiated an agreement with Jayne Nicholls for her to manufacture and sell the Worm-a-way™ in UK. It took several months to work out the details, but we are now both anxious for people to learn about it and be able to purchase Worm-a-ways in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. I'll tell you more about that in the feature. In my essay I share with you background on how this fits into my business philosophy on making decisions with the environment in mind.

I've returned from an exciting time on the road for my fall speaking engagements. . . to St. Louis, Missouri; Gibson City, Illinois; Columbus, Georgia; Middlebury, Vermont; and Traverse City, Michigan. I'll report on them later.

Meantime, welcome aboard all of you new subscribers. And, for the rest of you, thank you for your patience. Drop me a line if you have stories to share! The world of worms has delightful tales to reveal!

Sincerely,  
Mary Appelhof

<http://www.wormwoman.com>

Changing the way the world thinks about garbage

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

The following media release went out in late September. Jayne Nicholls and I have worked diligently since June to work out the details of the agreement and we are pleased to make this announcement to WormEzine readers all over the world. You are welcome to use this in your newsletter or forward it to media and individuals who may be interested. MAA

**WORM-A-WAY™ IN UK**

For Immediate Release

September 29, 2004

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**Rights to Market Mary Appelhof's Worm-a-way™ Move Across the Pond**

KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN USA

RUGELEY, STAFFS, UK Mary Appelhof of Kalamazoo, Michigan, author of the popular how-to book, "Worms Eat My Garbage," and Jayne Nicholls of Nicholls and Sons of Rugeley, UK, announce their agreement for Nicholls to market Appelhof's Worm-a-way™ vermicomposting bin in the UK.

"My mission is to change the way the world thinks about garbage," says Appelhof. "To think of it as a resource, rather than to throw it away." Redworms have been turning her kitchen food waste into nutrient-rich, earthy-smelling humus for over 30 years. She says, "Through Jayne's efforts, people in the UK will be able to purchase a complete system that meets the needs of both worms and their caretakers."

Nicholls has been vermicomposting (composting with worms) in the UK for over two years. She liked the convenience of being able to bury her food discards into a bin in her garden, then use the vermicompost produced by the worms (worm manure) to grow vegetables without having to use chemical fertilizers. "I'm concerned about the health and safety of my kids," says Nicholls. "I have triplet sons who are beginning school just this week. I want them to grow up in an environment free of toxic chemicals. Having a worm bin is one little thing I can do, but I wanted to do something bigger. Selling Mary Appelhof's Worm-a-way™ is a bigger thing I can do."

It's getting harder to bury organic waste in landfills in England. Recent regulations say that organic waste must be kept out of landfills, partly to save limited space, and partly to prevent the toxic leachates that develop when organic materials decompose next to heavy metals and hazardous chemicals. Appelhof says, "It doesn't make sense to bury organic waste in a tomb, whether it be a dry one or a wet one. Either way, the topsoil that worms could create out of that resource is wasted. Get enough people doing worm composting and we'll have safer, better tasting food, fewer problems with landfills and incinerators, and a better environmental conscience all around."

Each Worm-a-way that Nicholls sells (two sizes available) will consist of a container made of recycled plastic with its unique ventilation system developed by Appelhof, her book, "Worms Eat My Garbage", a garden fork, and enough of the proper kind of worms (*Eisenia fetida*) to get started. "We ship worms all the time by mail and UPS," says Appelhof. Jayne has assurances from delivery services in UK that they can get both worms and bins to her customers dependably.

Flowerfield Enterprises is a mail-order business that develops and markets educational materials on vermicomposting. Its publishing imprint, Flower Press, publishes the how-to book "Worms Eat My Garbage," a classroom activity book and curriculum guide, "Worms Eat Our Garbage," and a children's picture book, "Compost, By Gosh!"  
<http://www.wormwoman.com>

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2=====ESSAY=====

### **Decision Making with the Environment in Mind**

A term being touted about these days is "Sustainable Business" and "Sustainable Business Practices." I just did a Google search that came up with over 4 million hits for sustainable business. A Sustainable Business Forum is just getting under way here in Kalamazoo. I realize that I've been acting under the sustainability ideology from my first ventures into business and share with you some of that history.

When I got started with worms over 30 years ago, few people were talking about the concept of sustainability. Some people, however were paying attention to what humans were doing to the environment. The Club of Rome published a document entitled "Limits to Growth," a book that pointed out serious flaws in the industrial economy. Bigger was not always better. We couldn't just mine, and exploit, and take from the earth and have a planet that people would want to live on.

The United Nations planned a Conference on the Human Environment to be held in Stockholm in June, 1972. Prior to the conference many discussions took place among people who were concerned that the official delegations from all over the world would not address critical issues such as nuclear testing, population, and warfare by

defoliation, so they planned an alternative conference, "The Environmental Forum," to take place on the other side of town in Stockholm. No requirements, no registration fees, all you had to do was come. I went. My parents generously supported my quest to be able to interact with people who were on the cutting edge of thinking about how we could change the direction human beings were taking this planet. So I was able to hear, in person, Barry Commoner and Margaret Mead and Paoli Solari during panel discussions and more informal gatherings.

### **Develop Sound Technologies to Begin With**

It was Barry Commoner, speaking for the Scientist's Institute for Public Information, who made me acknowledge my place in trying to make a better world. He said that we don't have time to take the approach the official delegations are droning on and on about across town. It takes too long to develop standards, monitor, litigate, and penalize the offenders. What we need is to develop sound technologies to begin with. To develop ecologically sound ways of producing goods to meet basic human needs. To look at the costs to the environment of the way we are doing things, and find ways to put the environment first.

In that auditorium in Stockholm, among hundreds who were seeking ways to feed their families and their nations, to find sensible ways to control populations without depending upon war and pollution and environmental degradation to balance the numbers, I realized, "Worms! Worms are one of those sound technologies. Worms can help heal the earth doing what they've been doing for millions of years. And no matter how many worms I raise, or am responsible for other people raising, the earth will be better off."

### **Make the Environment a Priority**

So here I am, thirty-two years later, teaching another generation about worms. And still making the environment a priority as I make business decisions. This will be the first of several brief articles I will write to describe how I make the environment a priority as I make business decisions.

Early this summer Jayne Nicholls emailed me about wanting to sell my Worm-a-way™ in the UK, I told her that I was not interested in shipping large, heavy plastic containers across the ocean. Even if "economies of scale" would make unit costs for shipping relatively low, it didn't make sense to me to use up fossil fuels to ship them on pallets in containers across the ocean, truck them to her place, and re-ship them to her customers. Making the environment a priority made it more sensible to work out a licensing arrangement where she would locate in the UK suitable bins and pipes. I suggested that if she would arrange for drilling the holes and purchase books from me, she could then manufacture and distribute Worm-a-way™ bins there in the UK for sale in the UK. She would be required by license to find bins that are made of recycled plastic, offer the right kind of worm, and meet all the other criteria for making the UK Worm-a-way™ according to my specifications.

During the next 3 months Jayne and I wrote dozens of emails and sent each other links to websites. We talked on the phone. She learned that my mother was born in Leeds, England. And I learned that she had triplet sons who were about ready to go to school so she would have more time to develop this new aspect of her business. We developed a relationship in which we could talk about why it was important to have her territory the UK rather than just England, or why I chose not to have a spigot in the bottom of the Worm-a-way™.

Jayne and I spent a lot of time developing this working relationship. We developed a level of trust in each other even as we worked on the details of the licensing agreement. It's been a steep learning curve for both of us. But we feel good about what we have accomplished through the process. And know that once people in UK start using worms to compost their kitchen and garden residues in Worm-a-way™ bins, less organic waste will go to landfills, and gardens will have nutrient-rich vermicompost to feed plants. People will feel better about themselves because they will be doing something good for the earth.

We made decisions based upon what would be best for the environment. Yet through the process we provided a business opportunity for Jayne that she was willing to work for, and assigned a value to my intellectual property that will generate income if she is successful. And more worms will continue their work to heal the earth through our efforts. If we can do it, so can you!

Mary Appelhof

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

A. SAVING THE PLANET WITH WORMS. Vermicomposting is method that can really bring life to your garden, by Annie Addington. Ledger-Enquirer.com of Columbus, GA. October 14, 2004. Annie attended my lecture at Columbus State and took good notes. If you want to find out what I said, access her article (for a limited time) at:  
<http://www.ledgerenquirer.com/mld/ledgerenquirer/living/9910208.htm>

B. KEENE STATE COLLEGE, KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE, RECEIVES EPA GRANT TO ENHANCE VERMICOMPOSTING CURRICULUM IN GRADES 7-12. Keene State College. along with its partners, is receiving \$15,450 to expand its successful elementary level vermicomposting curriculum. This project introduces and establishes vermicomposting in high schools by creating a core curriculum for grades 7-12, combining vermicomposting with the National Geography Standards.  
<http://www.epa.gov/region1/pr/2004/oct/041019.html>

C. WORM DIGEST TURNS OVER LEADERSHIP. After 10 years as co-editor or editor of Worm Digest, Zorba Frankel announced in Issue 36 that he has turned over his responsibilities to Pete Bogdanov of Vermico, Inc. If it were not for Zorba, worm workers around the world would not have the excellent resource Worm Digest has been. This attractive, informative, fun publication has kept us informed, amused, and alerted to developments in the classroom, the worm bin, and the industry. Reading the issue topics on the back page alone give an overview of the breadth and scope of vermicomposting in the past ten years. Earthworms and Human Waste, Vermicomposting in School Gardens, Worm Growers and Sellers, Raising Earthworms with Rabbits, Compost Tea Issue, Teachers' Issue. . . The back issues are a goldmine, even now. You can order sets of back issues. Individual subscriptions for 4 issues are only \$14 in US, \$20 international. You can order bulk sets for distribution. It gives advertisers an opportunity to run ads to a very targeted market.

Worm Digest's web presence is phenomenal. The Worm Digest Forum is extremely active, with over 30,000 posts archived since its inception. Worm Digest became a 501 c3 non-profit under Zorba's watch, and has a board of directors that is changing over with the passing of the baton to Pete. Zorba is completing a masters in science education, has

done his student teaching, and expects to have his own elementary classroom by this time next year. He says the thing that convinced him he wanted to go into teaching was teaching all of those worm workshops.

The community of worm workers couldn't have a better choice than Pete Bogdanov, with his wife Layne to take over the Worm Digest. Pete is a thoughtful and sensitive communicator. He is the best interviewer I've known, and I speak from one who has been the subject of an interview, and read interviews he has done. Pete's current newsletter, Castings Call serves people in the worm industry more than Worm Digest. WD is of more interest to the casual user of vermicomposting (are there any?) or the educator, whether a recycling coordinator who teaches about worm composting in his/her community, or a teacher with a worm bin in the classroom. As all things do, Worm Digest will evolve. But we can be sure that it is in good hands, and that the interests of worms, and worm workers will be well tended to under Pete's and Layne's domain. Access Worm Digest at: <http://www.wormdigest.org>

D. COMPANY CONVERTS WORM CASTINGS INTO FERTILIZER by Gwen Mickelson. Santa Cruz Sentinel, October 17, 2004. A newly-formed company, Soil Restoration and Research will be processing manures on a large scale and producing worm castings for organic fertilizers and amendments. CEO Mike Keller has teamed up with Dr. Scott Subler as research director and several other credible players in the vermiculture industry. According to Mickelson, the company is capable of producing 12,000 lbs (6 tons) of worm castings per day. Read the article at: <http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2004/October/17/biz/stories/01biz.htm>

4=====COMMENTS FROM THE EMAILROOM=====

Subject: Handling of "tea"

Dear Les,

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you, but, as you know, I was in London last week, and it does take a while to get caught up.

Regarding your questions about "tea" in the Worm-a-way, we don't use the same definitions for this material. It really isn't worm urine, nor do I use the term "tea" to refer to it. If there is excess liquid in the bin, and most people do not find that it is present, I would call it leachate, and not necessarily something that I would want to spray directly on my plants. Leachate could result from having too much really juicy food waste in the bin, or adding too much water originally, or having a lot of condensation from high moisture in the bin and condensation from temperature changes. Placing dry shredded paper on top of the bedding often tends to distribute the moisture so that the paper becomes damp after a day or two, and there is less moisture in the bottom of the bin.

The holes into which the vents and vent caps are placed are above the bottom of the bin, so normally, liquid does not seep out. If liquid does build up, one recommendation is to use a turkey-baster to remove the excess.

The reason that I don't refer to this as "tea" is that I am being fussy about what I chose to call compost tea. I am using a definition closer to what I describe in the article, "Worm Bins and Compost Teas" that can be found at

[http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/articles\\_compost-tea.html](http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/articles_compost-tea.html)

Because this requires aerobic conditions to get the aerobic microorganisms reproducing as the compost or vermicompost is swirling in the bucket to extract the nutrients and organisms, your definition doesn't fit with mine. When water builds up in the bottom of a bin, oxygen is often deficient and anaerobic conditions result. The microorganisms that thrive in this environment produce end-products such as alcohol and phenols that can be toxic to plants. It also smells. So it's best not to have this build-up. Hence using a drier bedding if food waste is really wet.

I hope this responds to your questions without throwing too much scientific jargon at you. And I do hope you'll give our Worm-a-way a try.

Sincerely,

Mary Appelhof

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

A. NOVEMBER 10-11. COMPOST WORKSHOP WITH DR. ELAINE INGHAM  
NOVEMBER 15-16. COMPOST TEA WORKSHOP WITH DR. ELAINE INGHAM, both sponsored by Soil FoodWeb/Sustainable Studies. Each workshop includes lecture, group discussion and tour of a production facility. Cost: \$375. Corvallis, Oregon.  
<http://www.soilfoodweb.com> or call 541-752-5066

B. DECEMBER 9-11, 2004. ACRES, USA ANNUAL ECOFARMING CONFERENCE, MINNEAPOLIS, MN "Food as Medicine, Farm as Healer." An amazing and high-energy conference for food production practitioners who using and reporting on commercially-viable techniques for sustainable/organic farming. Preceded by 2-3 intensive workshops with Elaine Ingham, Sally Fallon, and others.  
<http://www.acresusa.com> or call 512-892-4448

C. JANUARY 19-22. THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL ECOLOGICAL FARMING CONFERENCE, ASIMOLAR CONFERENCE CENTER, PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA.  
<http://www.eco-farm.org> or call 831-763-2111

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

A. THINK WORMS FOR KIDS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

*Compost, By Gosh!* by Michelle Eva Portman is a delightful, charming picture book to give to your grandchild, or to use for the younger ones in your home-school.

"In a dark, plastic bin  
Where light rarely reaches  
Warm darkened earth  
Was once berries and peaches

As I open the lid  
I know what I'll find  
A drama unfolds  
That boggles the mind. . . Michelle Eva Portman

I've read it to over 2000 kids by now. And that doesn't count the thousands more who have heard me read it on the radio, whether at Point Reyes, California, here in

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Michigan, or in St. Louis, Missouri. It lets you know little girls don't have to be afraid of worms. And their mothers can use electric drills to drill holes in a plastic bin. The black humus the worms produce makes plants grow better.

*Compost, By Gosh!*

Level: ages 4-94

Specs: 42 pps, hardbound, 6 3/8" by 8 3/4", full color, step by step HOW TO Instructions and Resources

ISBN: 0-942256-16-6

[View excerpt and review](#)

[http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Compost\\_By\\_Gosh\\_.html](http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Compost_By_Gosh_.html)

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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PLEASE FORWARD a copy of this free ezine to anyone you know who may be interested in learning more about worm bins, vermicomposting, and the field of vermiculture.

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