

## WormEzine Vol. 1 No. 4

News and information from Mary Appelhof

... about vermicomposting, worms, and other critters that live in the soil.

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

1===== A WORD FROM MARY APPELHOF (a.k.a. WormWoman)=====

Dear Worm Workers,

I've had my vacation in Michigan's northwoods including time on Beaver Island, which is 34 miles out in Lake Michigan's deep blue waters. We had lovely weather and welcomed the relief from the scorching heat and humidity we had endured most of the summer. Our three cats, Punkin, Pooh Bear, and Puff went along this time and I was surprised that they seemed to be right at home ... didn't even mind the car trip and poked around outside the cabin without venturing off too far. I think they preferred to be with us than be home alone with a catsitter coming in to feed them.

I leave for Cardiff, Wales, August 30 for the International Symposium on Earthworm Ecology VII where I look forward to getting together with international colleagues from years back and being brought up to date on some of the new developments. I'll be participating in two poster sessions with *Worms Eat My Garbage--They Can Eat Yours, Too!* and *Program Support for School Vermicomposting Programs in USA*. The content for this poster is the feature article this month. People frequently ask, "How do you get funding to do vermicomposting at the institutional level?" This piece identifies several programs that show how unique and diverse educational programs on vermicomposting can be. Maybe it will give you some ideas!

I will share information with you all from the 7<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Earthworm Ecology in my next issue! Please send me an email or drop me a note if you want to update me on vermicomposting in your neck of the global worm bin.

## **Program Support for School Vermicomposting Programs in USA**

Thousands of teachers in the United States use vermicomposting in the classroom to meet broad educational objectives and introduce the next generation to vermicomposting. Many of the programs exist because an enthusiastic teacher learned about how excited children became when they could see, smell, and dig their hands in a classroom worm bin. Other programs exist because state, county, and city agencies sponsor and fund vermicomposting programs not only as a way to "reduce, reuse, and recycle," but also to meet educational objectives for science, math, language arts, and more. The following paragraphs will outline several successful programs that I have had involvement on one level or another.

### **LITES Program, Oakland, California**

The National Science Foundation funded a five-year \$3.1 million program to improve science teaching in elementary schools. Focusing on inquiry-based and hands-on learning, over 400 worm bins were made available to classroom teachers, along with a training program, curricular materials and follow-up support.

### **Montgomery County, Maryland**

The VermiLab program of the Department of Environmental Protection reaches approximately 10,000 students annually. Ultimate goal of the program is to change the waste generation and recycling habits of both students and their families. The county distributed over 224 vermicomposting bins and curricular materials in more than 100 schools. A giant puppet, "Digger Worm" made hundreds of appearances to schools, events and shopping malls to spread the composting word. The initial costs for this program were only \$56 per classroom. (See Resources below)

### **Laytonville Middle School, Laytonville, California**

Garden director and teacher Binet Payne developed with her students an integrated program for recycling paper, cans, glass, milk cartons and food wastes from the cafeteria using mid-scale vermicomposting. Paper from the elementary classrooms is shredded for worm bedding and the worms convert the veggie and fruit waste into nutrient-rich vermicompost for the school gardens.

### **The State of Wisconsin**

The Wisconsin's Natural Resources Magazine published a four-color 16-page insert on vermicomposting, which proved to be very popular—the initial distribution was 104,000. Titled *A New Wiggle on Waste*, the publication supports and encourages teachers to expand their vision of what they could do with vermicomposting. Additionally, the state distributed nearly 500 copies of "*The Worm Cafe: Mid-Scale Vermicomposting of Lunchroom Wastes*" by Binet Payne. This program exposed hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin folks of all ages to vermicomposting for approximately \$35,000.

### **The State of New Hampshire**

The Governor's Office of Recycling in New Hampshire sponsored the distribution of 200 vermicomposting bins and curricular materials to elementary classrooms in 1992/1993. Although original plans were to rotate the bin among several classrooms, one teacher stated that, "The teachers and kids didn't want to give it up to the next class." This ownership enabled the program to grow and gain attention while enriching educational objectives. Popular demand from students brought the program back to the classroom in 2002 with over 40 bins and supportive educational materials requested by students and their teachers.

### **San Jose, California**

The City of San Jose offers teacher-training workshops where participating teachers receive a worm bin and curricular materials to empower their youngsters to positively impact their environment. The California Integrated Solid Waste Management Board has recently revised their curriculum on vermicomposting in

response to demand for the information. (See Resources below)

All of the programs vary in scope, reach and application. What is overwhelmingly evident is that where there is a will there is a way and a worm bin!

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

A. About 18 people attended Rhonda Sherman's workshop in North Carolina on starting a worm farm. There is apparently a lot of interest there in setting up a worm business, so Rhonda wanted to make sure that people got good information. Rhonda, Dr. Scott Subler, Kelly Slocum, and Al Eggen provided the content as attendees were enlightened with their collective wisdom on growing and selling earthworms for profit. If you missed the workshop, but would like info visit <http://www.soil.ncsu.edu/>

B. Did you get the idea that excess nitrates might be a problem from last month's WormEzine? A report from ACRES USA told about a study in Iowa that was designed to trap excess nitrate runoff from fertilizer applications by means of woodchips. They found that trenches of woodchips did keep the nitrates from entering groundwater. But how many wood chips does it take? Six-foot deep trenches, two feet wide, loaded with 5 feet of wood chips, then covered with soil, every 10 feet, located between the tiles for draining excess water from the field. Hum. I did a few calculations. I figure about 11 semi-loads of wood chips per acre. I wonder how many bushels of corn you're going to have to grow to pay for that? Maybe they ought to look at applying Compost Tea and get some soil foodweb organisms back into the soil!

C. We here at Flower Press are EXCITED to announce that we have partnered with Michelle Portman of the Northeast and will be publishing her children's book on vermicomposting! This delightful and colorful book titled "Compost By Gosh!" is suitable for reading to your 4 year-old and enjoyed by those from 4 to 94. Third graders will be able to read it by themselves ... over and over and over again. We hope to have copies available by Halloween, perhaps earlier. You can get your copy at my web site: <http://www.wormwoman.com/>

D. BACK-TO-SCHOOL REMINDER for educators. You can enhance your classroom's biology discussion with **Earthworm Visual Series (Transparencies)**. This set of overhead transparencies of earthworm anatomy and reproduction provides clear, labeled diagrams of earthworm features such as segments, setae, clitellum, mouth, and hearts. You will receive this set of 6 overheads AND the What part is this? Overhead for end of unit quiz/test purposes for \$30—mention that you are a WormEzine subscriber and receive \$5 off of each set that you order. The direct link to order on-line is [http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman\\_catalog\\_Posters\\_and\\_Transparencies\\_57.html](http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman_catalog_Posters_and_Transparencies_57.html) Also note that there are other classroom aids available for purchase—posters, puppets, videos and of course books.

3=====RESOURCES=====

#### ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM

The PG&E National Energy Group is accepting applications for its annual Environmental Education Grant Program. Grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000 will be awarded for innovative programs that encourage and support educating young people about the environment. Those eligible to apply for grants include K-12 schools, non-profit organizations engaged in educational projects related to earth science, conservation and the environment, and teacher training programs with hands-on student activities that focus on earth science and environmental education projects. In 2001 31 schools in 16 states received grants!

Application deadline: September 30th. Application guidelines available on

<http://www.neg.pge.com/grantFAQ.html>

California Integrated Waste Management Board can be accessed through

<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/> this site is chock full of information, resources, data, trends and programs. Their mission is to reduce waste, promote the management of all materials to their highest and best use, and protect public health and safety and the environment, in partnership with all Californians.

VermiLab program of Montgomery County, Maryland is overviewed at the EPA's site and is a wonderful read with beneficial info on their VermiLab program. You can view it for yourself at <http://www.co.mo.md.us/services/dep/Composting/vermilab.htm>.

4===== (Current and ) COMING EVENTS =====

A. INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON EARTHWORM ECOLOGY 7—Sept. 1-6 in Cardiff, Wales. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> major international earthworm conference since the Vermilennium in Kalamazoo, Michigan USA in 2000. (If you missed the Vermilennium and would like to receive the abstracts or a video of the highlights, both are available at my website.) I will be presenting at the Vermicomposting Workshop, which is a more informal session than the majority of the scientific sessions. Additionally, my materials on "Basic Vermicomposting" will be displayed and reviewed in the poster sessions.

B. MINI-SYMPOSIUM ON EARTHWORMS Sept. 7 at The National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. This event for youth takes place the Saturday following ISEE7 and takes advantage of local and international experts in town for the symposium. The schedule includes Mary Appelhof (Worms Eat My Garbage), Rhys Jones (Snakes are NOT Worms - Feel Them!), Geoff Baker (Worms Down Under), Trevor Pearce (Worms are Nice - to Eat!?), Jill Clapperton (Junior Science Experiences in Canada), and Liz McCurdy (Worms in the American Classroom). I'll be using my "Slides on T-Shirts" presentation with Wales' schoolchildren at the Wales National Museum on Saturday, so I expect to do lots of sharing. I hope to connect with people at the Center for Alternative Technology in Wales prior to my return home on Sept. 12.

C. VERMICO BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN VERMICOMPOSTING Oct. 11-12 (Note corrected date from previous posting!) in Portland, OR at the Airport Shilo Inn. Fee of \$299 includes 2 lunches, 420-page manual, and 2 full days of instruction and personal contact with world-class worm workers Mary Appelhof, Dr. Scott Subler, Kelly Slocum, Dan Holcombe, and other invited special guest speakers. If her schedule permits, Dr. Elaine Ingham of Soil Foodweb, Inc. will give a presentation on compost teas. Call 541-476-9626 or register online at: <http://www.vermico.com/>

D. BIONEERS CONFERENCE IN SAN RAFAEL Oct. 19-21, Marin Center, San Rafael, California  
The Bioneers Conference is the preeminent gathering of visionaries with practical solutions for restoring the Earth. For both professional and general audiences, this three-day annual event equips participants with models, resources and networks, encouraging everyone to act as primary forces in the transformation toward a restorative future. Experience Bioneers. Join this dynamic community in creating a future environment of hope. Visit <http://www.permacultureactivist.net/bioneers/Bioneers.htm> or Toll free 877-BIONEER for more information or to register!

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

Mary Appelhof (a.k.a. WormWoman) 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*.

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