

WormEzine

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

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Dear Worm Workers,

Since you received your last WormEzine I participated in the International Symposium on Earthworm Ecology in Wales and took in another ZERI training in New Mexico. I recently returned from a two-week tour on the West Coast where I traveled in Oregon, Washington, and California. I gave my "Worm Bins and Compost Tea" presentation, attended Vermico's Best Management Practices in Vermicomposting Seminar, the Bioneers Conference, and Soil to Soul Workshop with Elaine Ingham and Glen Atkinson.

During my six weeks of travel I have renewed contact with old friends and met many new people. I have gotten updates on who is doing what and where and visited several facilities where vermicomposting on a large scale is taking place in an efficient, well-controlled manner. Some of my photographs were very good and I will report on these facilities sometime in the near future.

As you can imagine, I'm rather overwhelmed as I try to catch up with my email, reading, homework for ZERI, and correspondence, hence the tardiness of this month's WormEzine. Not to worry, however. I'm naming this the October issue even though it's getting to you in November. I focus on how I harvested my outdoor Patio Bench Worm Bin this month ... a task I did on a sunny weekend in between my travels.

November's WormEzine will be sent out soon, because I want to describe how I'll prepare that same bin for our Michigan winter. Thanks for your patience!

Be sure to let me know if you have any news that you want me to include in an issue of the WormEzine. Also, check out the new Worm Bins Around The World section of my web site. And perhaps order a gorgeous Seeds poster for your home or office to celebrate this harvest season.

Sincerely,

Mary

“Changing the way the world thinks about garbage one wormbin at a time.”

To read the archives on the web, visit the following:

<http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/wormezine.html>

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

HARVESTING MY PATIO BENCH WORM BIN

Mary Appelhof

What is more synonymous with Fall than Harvest? It's the time when I am apt to harvest my Patio Bench Worm Bin, partly because I need to make room for lots of fresh bedding and food waste to get the worms through the winter, but also because there is so much beautifully processed vermicompost to harvest and set aside for making potting soil, castings tea, or to top dress plants in the spring. There are many right ways to harvest a bin. Here's how I did mine. (You can see color photographs of harvesting my bin on my website at http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/worm_bins_world.html. I've kept this WormEzine version as a user- and space-friendly verbal description of the process so as not to clog up your email with unwanted bytes.)

THE BIN AND WHAT WENT INTO IT

My wooden bin is several years old and still functional, but a bit weatherworn. Construction diagrams and building instructions similar to this bin with a hinged lid appear in "*Worms Eat My Garbage*," 2nd edition (Flower Press, 1997). It is approximately 2 feet x 4 feet x 1 foot (60 cm x 120 cm x 30 cm), with a capacity of 7.5 cubic feet (177 liters). I put almost all of the organic food waste from our kitchen in the bin, that includes chicken and other bones, corn husks, rotten cucumbers, tomatoes, potato peels, peanut shells, shrimp shells, avocado pits ...you get the picture.

For the most part, I use newspaper for bedding, either hand or machine-shredded. Sometimes the machine-shredded paper I bring home from my office includes junk mail with plastic see-through windows that were not removed. I say this because I end up with plastic strips as a contaminant in my vermicompost, and it's a nuisance to remove it from the finished material. I also get annoyed at the little plastic tabs with numbers that grocery stores now stick on individual pieces of fruit and vegetables to identify them for pricing. Why can't they use paper for these tabs so they would at least decompose in a worm bin? During the summer I may add some dried grass clippings, leaves, horse manure, weeds, and other garden debris just to give the worms and other critters some biodiversity. I also add water occasionally to keep the contents moist.

Two or three weeks prior to harvesting the bin I stopped putting fresh garbage onto the side I was going to harvest. I also refrained from watering that side so that the vermicompost would dry out a bit and be easier to screen. Screening isn't essential, but it sure does make a nice-looking end product, which smells good and has nice texture!

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT (Suggested)

Garden Way Cart

3/8-inch mesh hardware cloth screen stapled to wooden frame

5-6 plastic buckets, 5 gallons or so

Net bag (for bones)

Plastic bag (for trash)

Scoop

Worm fork

Dustpan

Utility tub (for the "overs"-pieces too large to go through the screen)

I knew this task would take me several hours, and I wanted to be comfortable, so I got a bucket I could sit on while I pawed through the bin. I put the Garden Way Cart next to the worm bin and placed the wooden framed screen across the sides. After I transferred piles of vermicompost from the bin to the screen with the scoop, I scraped, jostled, and shook the screen to get the vermicompost to fall through onto the cart. I then picked through the vermicompost to set aside the plastic strips, bones, and pesky little food tags. Every once in awhile I would scrape up the beautiful screened vermicompost and put it into one of the buckets. I found a few worms, but not usually all that many. I threw the ones I found over onto the working side of the bin. I found almost no cocoons in this well-processed vermicompost.

I call the material that wouldn't go through the screen, like pieces of avocado pits and large clumps of vermicompost, perhaps some undecomposed peanut shells, "overs," as is the custom in the composting industry. Since I was hand sorting I could remove the plastic and bones, a few rubber bands, and a couple of milk-bottle caps. The remainder of the overs would decompose and provide nutrients and microorganisms to any plant so I chose to dump these large clumps out of site under the spruce trees.

BLACK GOLD AND A MINOR AMOUNT OF TRASH

I harvested about 2/3 of the bin in this manner, taking it right down to bare wood. I left the rest of the vermicompost, all of the worms, bedding, and undecomposed food waste in the bin to keep it going. From my harvest I ended up with about 20 gallons of dark, rich, earthy-smelling vermicompost, a bag of bones as big as a soccer ball, and about a gallon of those dumb little plastic stickers and the long, tangled plastic strips from junk mail. Although the bones are quite light and dry, I'll hang them up in the garage. Next spring I'll break them down with a sledgehammer and put them in the garden as bone meal. Nancy Essex, my operations manager, says she just recycles bones in her bin, and they eventually disappear, too!

That is all there is to it, before you know it you will be spreading your glorious castings in the spring. Don't forget to check out the pictures at:

http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/worm_bins_world.html.

2=====NOTABLE BITS=====

A. The Wonderful World of Worms exhibit in the National Museum of Wales is the first extensive collaboration between conference organizers of a major international conference on earthworms and a local community. The exhibit in Cardiff will remain up until January 2003. Highlighted by the 16 foot long Vermillennium banners hanging from the imposing limestone columns of the Museum foyer, the exhibit has displays on large scale vermicomposting, a selection of Wiggly Worms various home composting units and educational materials, earthworm anatomy, and worms as food for other animals. Good work, John Morgan, for all your efforts and enthusiasm in coordinating your knowledge with the expertise of the museum staff!

B. Ken Kelly reminded me that Santa Clara Master Composters are partners in the vermicomposting workshops for teachers that I talked about last month in the item about San Jose, California. I have a photograph of Ken in an outdoor amphitheater at the San Jose Children's Museum describing to an impressive group of teachers how to set up their worm bins! Thanks for the reminder, Ken. I talked to another Santa Clara Master Composter on the phone last night ... you sure are an active group!

C. VERMICO's Best Management Practices in Vermicomposting held in Portland was sold out with about 90 attendees. This 2-day seminar is the best tool in the country for finding out what the basic requirements are for moving up from a small-scale vermicomposting operation to one that is large enough to possibly require purchase of feedstock, permits, serious marketing efforts and concern with standards. Some people come year after year in order to stay up to date with the latest developments and concerns. They also benefit from the active networking that occurs because the speakers and fellow attendees are so approachable.

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

A. "Compost, By Gosh!" by Michelle Portman is moving along nicely through the extensive publishing process. Final approval of color proofs went to the printers today, so we still hope to have copies in house in time for Christmas. I must have read this

delightful children's picture book to 50 people while I was on my west coast tour, and everyone just loved it. You can preorder your own copies today at:

<http://www.wormwoman.com>

All preorders receive a WORMY surprise with their books!
(Flower Press)

4=====COMING EVENTS=====

A. Nov. 21-23. EARTHWORMS AND SOIL'S FERTILITY conference, Vladimir, Russia. Contact: Igor Titov. Billed as The First International Scientific Practical Conference, the conference program includes topics on:

- Biology and selection of earthworms
- Methods of vermicomposting of organic wastes
- Industrial technologies of vermicomposting or organic wastes
- Production of alternative organic fertilizers
- Production and application of humic substances in agriculture
- Restoration of soils with the help of earthworms
- Biotechnologies of production of food additives, permixes, enzymes and vitamins

Papers will be in English or in Russian, with English and Russian to be the main languages. A concurrent discussion is expected to take place on the Internet. Vladimir is about 2 1/2 hours north of Moscow by train.

Contact: Igor Titov at email: ic_pic@port33.ru
Tel: (0922) 32 10 42 FAX: (0922) 32 79 60

B. Dec. 5-9. ZERI Training in Santa Fe. This is the final session of the first USA ZERI Training with Gunter Pauli. I have found this to be a very stimulating, but demanding, program to be a participant in. A major concept of ZERI (Zero Emissions Research Initiative) is that "No kingdom eats its own waste. Waste of one kingdom is food for another." As I read Lynn Margulis' book, "Five Kingdoms," I got a much better idea of the diversity of organisms we have on our planet. After all, when I taught high school biology we only had nine kingdoms to deal with. Under Lynn's current scheme there are 96! Bottom line, I've got a lot more to learn!

C. Dec. 11-14, 2002. A second, three-module USA ZERI Training is scheduled immediately following the first. Sessions will be in Santa Fe, New Mexico in December, March, and June. Contact Lynda Taylor for more info: lyndataylor@cybermesa.com

5=====PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS=====

Seeds Through a Microscope (beautiful color poster)

One can hardly imagine the incredible beauty of the magnified images of these 40 different kinds of seeds photographed through a microscope by Warren A. Hatch. We're familiar with his work through the amazing video, *Worm Bin Creatures Alive Through the Microscope*. Now he presents us with images of seeds we would never see without his help. One (Devils Beggar tick) is large enough to fill the frame at a 10x magnification. Others, such as Tree Tobacco shows dozens of seeds at 20x. At 40x, Rose of Sharon looks like a warm, fuzzy toy. Most of the colors are subtle, which makes the brilliant red flesh of a strawberry stand out, enveloping its seeds in its tasty fruit. Each photograph is accompanied by a tiny black/white photograph rendered actual size so we can bridge the gap between what we see and what Warren reveals to us through his artistry. He identifies all seeds with their scientific names and their common names. A superb educational tool. A work of art; framed it is a beautiful addition to a natural interior design scheme. Regularly \$20.00 mention that you are an Ezine subscriber and save 25%! Ships same day. Click here to preview and order:

http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman_catalog_Posters_and_Transparencies_13.html

6=====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.

7===== THE SMALL PRINT=====

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