

The Way of the Worm
By Bridget Haworth

In a round about way the earthworm plays a vital roll in our health. In a back issue of Equinox magazine, Yale professor Ellsworth Huntington is quoted as saying, "throughout the ages civilizations have flourished where there was a healthy earthworm population." Cleopatra understood this and declared the earthworm to be sacred and alerted farmers not to harm them in any way.

Historically, healthy soil produces healthy plants that can repel insect and disease infestations. In turn healthy plants produce healthy people. Alternatively poor soil equates to sick plants and ultimately sick people. So what is healthy soil and how does one make sure their soil healthy?

The worm eats a combination of decaying organic matter such as kitchen scraps and leaves as well as soil. As they dig they eat, leaving their castings (worm poop) behind. These castings have a mixture rich in calcium and other plant nutrients. The end result is soil that is porous, high in nutrients, has a neutral pH, and a greater ability to hold moisture.

Using chemicals, particularly pesticides will reduce your chances of having a happy umber of worms (yes a group of worms is called an umber). Worms are a more cost effective way of working the soil. They eliminate the cost of using chemicals as well as making the soil easier to work so that less motorized equipment is required.

Worms are our gardening companions that give us what we want; a healthy growing medium that only needs occasional watering. The real question is how can we attract an umber of worms to our gardens or farms? The answer is simple. Start a composter where worms have plenty of food and a place to populate.

Composting can be done in or out of doors. If you compost outside then you likely have worms and other critters living there already and that is a good thing. An indoor composter is different in that the worms need to be housed in a container that suits their needs.

A free workshop to learn how to in-door compost using red wiggler worms will be held at the Craik Library, December 16, 7-8pm. Workshop includes a take home kit with bin & worms. Please register with Crystal at 734-7737 before Dec 14.