

Importance of earthworm as a natural farmer often overlooked

There are many natural phenomena that go unnoticed but are essential for life on earth. Plants in the legume family take nitrogen from the air and convert it into a form that can be used by plants. Bacteria and fungi invade dead trees and help break them down into nutrients available for living trees.

Another natural farmer found in gardens, meadows, and woodlands is the earthworm. Unless you are a person who likes to fish, you may not think about the importance of earthworms very often.

Even if you do not fish, you may become aware of earthworms on an early morning walk along a trail at one of the local parks. On the surface of the trail are numerous little piles of soil. If you get down on your knees and examine one carefully, you will notice that they are made of minute cylinders of soil.

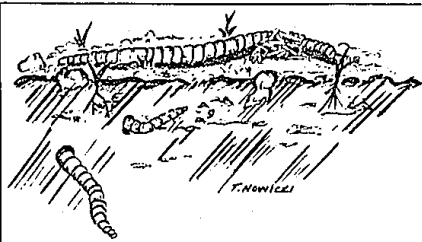
When earthworms emerge at night from their underground resting places, they discharge soil which they consumed as they burrowed. These piles are called "castings" and are very important to soils.

Once you recognize what those little piles are, you begin to realize how many of them there are. When Darwin did his classic work on the earthworm years ago in England, he estimated that there were more than 50,000 earthworms in one acre of garden soil. Another study reported 700 earthworms in one square yard of meadow soil.

As earthworms burrow thru the soil, sometimes to depths of seven or



nature
Timothy Nowicki



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eight feet, they bring to the surface minerals and nutrients that would be unavailable to plants and animals. Over the years, and multiplied by hundreds of earthworms, this process does what the farmers plow is

designed to do. Darwin estimated that earthworms can process 18 tons of soil per acre annually.

In addition to exposing new soil for plants and animals, earthworms add calcium from a special gland.

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Low-cal drink recipes

Q. Have you got any recipes for cool, refreshing, low-calorie drinks?

A. Try one or both of these bubbly fruit drinks. I think they fit your request:

PINEAPPLE SPRITZERS

Serves 10
Fruit Cubes: (Can be made ahead of time and dropped into any citrus juice)

- 1-1/2 cans (8 oz.) pineapple slices, packed in juice
- 1 cup unsweetened frozen, whole raspberries
- 2 cups unsweetened pineapple juice
- Spritzer:
- 2 quarts unsweetened pineapple juice, chilled
- 2 quarts seltzer water, chilled

Assemble two clean ice cube trays. Cut pineapple into small wedges. Evenly divide wedges and raspberries among the 32 ice cube tray compartments. Pour pineapple juice into trays. Freeze at least two hours.

To serve as individual spritzers: Place two frozen cubes in each glass (large wine glasses look particularly nice). Pour one-half cup seltzer and



Terry Gibb

one-half cup pineapple juice over cubes. Stir briefly. Serve immediately.

To serve as a punch: Mix pineapple juice and seltzer water in large, chilled punch bowl. Add all the fruit cubes. Stir briefly. Ladle into glasses.

Per Serving:
Calories: 105, fat: 0 grams, protein: 1 gram, carbohydrates: 26 grams, sodium: 3 mgs.

TROPICAL SANGRIA

Serves 10

- 2 cups seltzer water
- 1 cup unsweetened papaya juice (orange juice may be substituted if papaya juice is not available)
- 1 cup unsweetened pineapple juice
- 1/2 cup chopped, fresh papaya

- 1/2 cup sliced, fresh or frozen strawberries
- 1/2 cup chopped, fresh pineapple (or canned chunks packed in juice)
- 1 tray ice cubes

In large pitcher, combine all the ingredients. Add tray of ice cubes and stir. Per serving:
Calories: 27, fat: 0 grams, protein: 1 gram, carbohydrates: 7 grams, sodium: 2 mg.

Recipes from Nutrition Action's HEALTHLETTER, December, 1987.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to The Consumer Mailbag, Concorn, Detroit, One Kennedy Square, 4th floor, Detroit, 48226.

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