Worms! Who Cares?

Earthworms will bring these benefits to your garden or orchard.

- ✓ They aerate it by digging tunnels through which oxygen and water pass, making the soil more friable, giving it better water retention.
- ✓ They break up decaying organic waste material, homogenize it with the soil, fertilising as they go.
- ✓ They do not damage living plants. Although they like to live around plant roots, depositing their castings for the plants benefit, this seems to be because the roots exude a certain chemical into the soil, which the worms enjoy. The worms till the soil close to the plants without disturbing root systems, providing better drainage, and decreasing root rot.
- ✓ They cut down the need for expensive plant supplements and fertilisers.
- ✓ They prevent the spread of some fungal diseases by consuming rotting leaves, fruit and fungus spores in the orchard.
- ✓ They increase the activity of microbes.
- ✓ They improve soil structure.
- ✓ They increase pasture production – Some artificial fertilizers promote acidity. Ammonium sulphate in fertilizers is toxic for worms, and a high copper content in the soil is detrimental.

Worms prefer to live in fertile soil, but it is the worms that help make soil fertile by depositing their castings, extremely rich in nutrients and in a form immediately available for use by plants.

Mulch your garden or orchard: Apply 8-10cm away from base of plants and vines of preferably a heavy layer of organic refuse which slowly decays on the soil surface protecting soil and organisms from the harmful effects of sun, rain, wind, snow. Helps water absorption reduces runoff and erosion, shelters and feeds earthworms. Mulch includes straw, dead weeds, old manure's, fine shells, leaves, grass clippings, paper, cardboard, carpet, underfelt. Repeat monthly throughout the spring and early summer. Mulching gives the worms protection and cover and your plants the benefit of retained moisture. Weeds find it difficult to grow through the mulch, while the industrious earthworm goes about its business. Introduce a large population of worms and much of the work of cultivating and fertilising can be left to them.

Application of lime preserves the availability of phosphates and reducing the loss of nitrogen. Lime is continuously lost from the soil, mainly in rainwater and may be applied annually to most soils. Annual light dressings are preferable to heavy infrequent applications.

You will soon notice the rewards in introducing compost worms to your garden: healthier plants, fewer weeds, less need for insecticide sprays. All by providing the worms with a suitable environment to get on with the job of improving the soil.

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