

School-to-Nature



Earthworms in the Woods

“Night Crawlers” and earthworms can be very beneficial in gardens and farm fields, because worm movement through the soil allows the passage of air and loosens the soil. But- this movement of worms is very bad in forest lands. To thrive, the forest floor requires a deep layer of dead and dying leaves and other organics called “duff,” that cover the soil. Worm tunnels allow water and air to reach the soil too quickly, drying the duff and the soil below. Damage to this layer can result in the die-off of wildflowers and other forest-floor plants, including young trees. Insects, and small animals like salamanders and tree frogs that depend on this moist decaying vegetation for their food sources, will disappear as well.

Each earthworm has both male and female parts. For mating a jelly-like ring forms around the body. The worm crawls out of that ring, depositing sperm and eggs and the ring becomes a cocoon. Young worms emerge fully formed and will live 1-2 years. Earthworms have one nervous system inside that controls digestion, and another outside the body that controls movement. The worm excretes a fluid through skin pores that makes movement through soil easier and keeps the skin moist. The worm also breathes through its skin.

If you ever see earthworms stranded on a sidewalk or driveway after a heavy rain, don't let them dry out and die, but rather help to move them back to the grass, so that they can survive. Lawns and gardens are great places to have earthworms.

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