

# Earthworm Information Sheet



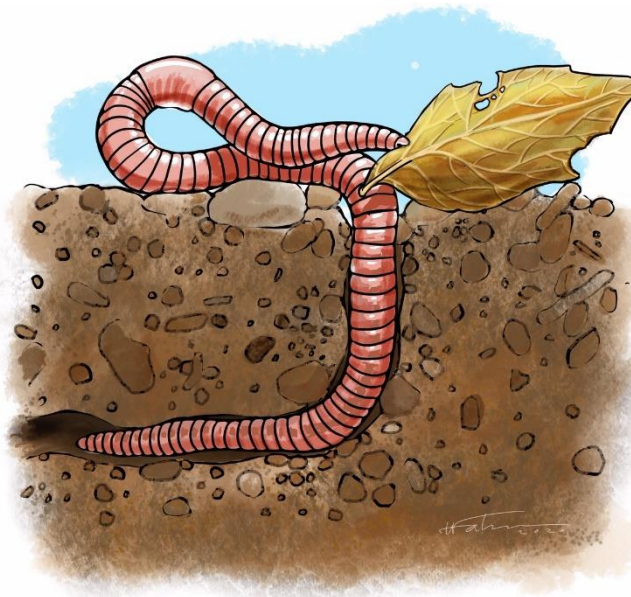
## Different names

In science, it is known as *Lumbricus terrestris*. The generic Latin name “Lumbricus” means “worm”, whilst “terrestris” means “terrestrial”, “earthy”, which leads to the most common name, “Earthworm”

In Malta it is called *hanex tal-hamrija* (soil worm), whilst in Swedish it is called *daggmask* (dew worm).

The Spanish and Catalan names are *Lombriz de tierra* and *Cuc de terra* respectively, both meaning “worm of the earth”.

All these languages assigned a name that is descriptive of the habitat where the earthworm commonly lives, in moist soil.



## Funders and partner organisations

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



The National Lottery Heritage Fund



## Traditions and beliefs

In Sweden, it used to be said that when the earthworms drill holes and come up even on footpaths, rain is coming.

In reality, earthworms do come to the surface when it rains. It is not entirely understood why, but there are a few theories.

Some say they find it easier to move across the soil surface when it is wet, to find food, new habitats or a mate. Rain creates vibrations on the soil surface, making earthworms to come out of their burrows to the surface. It is easier to move across the surface of the soil when it is wet, as they need a moist environment to survive.

Another theory is that earthworms confuse the rain with a predator, such as a mole, and so they make their way to the surface to escape.

It seems, that some birds exploit this behaviour by mimicking rain hitting their feet on the ground to encourage the earthworms to the surface for a nice worm meal.



## Sayings

“Qisu/Qisha hanex” (He/she is like an earthworm) is a Maltese expression used to describe very young children who are capable of doing activities beyond their age.

“Ghad igorru d-dud” (The worms will one day carry him/her), a Maltese expression used to describe lazy persons.

“A can of worms”, an English idiom which describes a situation or issue that becomes even more complicated as you try to deal with it or solve the problem.

“Even a worm will turn” is another English expression used to convey the message that even the meekest or most docile of creatures will retaliate or seek revenge if pushed too far.

## A source of food

Earthworms are eaten in many cultures, as a source of protein. In parts of China they are considered a delicacy.

In Iran they are baked and eaten with bread to reduce bladder stones.

In New Zealand the Maori use the culinary term Noke to refer to earthworms, although there are eight different types of earthworms with different names and different flavours, some of which were offered to chiefs and dying people as their last meal.

In South America, indigenous communities such as the Ye'Kuana tribe from Venezuela eat the earthworm as a delicacy and consider a particular type of earthworm as important food for pregnant women.

## Worm Charming

In east Texas and other parts of the world, worm charming is a traditional activity practice to encourage worms out of the soil, either to use as bait for fishing or as a sport. The method involves vibrating the soil either using a wooden stake, a garden fork or other tool to drive into the ground or drag across the surface to vibrate the soil. Possibly people got inspired from birds' behaviour to encourage worms from the soil, through tapping their feet.

In 1980 the World Worm Charming Championships started in a primary school in Willaston, Cheshire with a world record of raising 567 worms.

There is also the International Festival of Worm Charming in Devon, the Great Canadian Worm Charming Championship and the Worm Gruntin' Festival in Florida.

The Earthworm Society of Britain has nominated World Earthworm Day as 21st October.



## Earthworms are important

Earthworms help create humus, a dark brown–black type of soil which holds important nutrients in place for plant growth and use. Earthworms also help create good soil structure; their burrows open up the soil and create aeration and drainage channels. They also break dense soil, making it hospitable for plants.

They are also good decomposers and feed on plant debris (dead roots, leaves, grasses, manure) and soil.

Earthworm castings or excrement are rich in nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium the key minerals needed for plant growth. Earthworm castings also help bind calcium, iron, and sulfur to soil particles—minerals that also help plants thrive and improve farm productivity.

Earthworms are ranked the most influential species in history.

## Encouraging earthworms in gardens

If there are few earthworms in your garden it could mean that the soil is compacted or low in organic material. Add chopped leaves, grass clippings, semi-decomposed compost, and animal manure to your garden; these will allow worms to thrive.

If your garden has few or no earthworms, the best way to transfer worms into your garden is to dig up large chunks of soil or section of matted grass rich in worms and worm burrows and set them whole in your garden so that new earthworm colonies can get started.

