

WELCOME TO THE EARTHWORM INTEREST GROUP OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (EIGSA)

We would like to thank you for your interest and bid you a hearty welcome to EIGSA

To give you some background about earthworms and their considerable versatility, please take a look at the following facts, after which we will give you some background information about our organisation.

ABOUT EARTHWORMS

Over 6 000 species have been identified worldwide.

These can be broadly divided into two main groups:- Those which live on top of the soil in humus (broadly called compost worms) and those live at different depths in the soil (called tunnelling worms.) Neither can survive for long in the other's environment.

Roughly 320 of these two species have been identified in Southern Africa, including one of the longest species on the planet, some specimens of which get up to 7m in length.

All earthworms produce vermicasts (worm poop!) and vermitea (worm wee), both of which improve soil structure, soil health and fertility. They are the only creatures on earth which can take in rubbish and pass out really good material.

.How have these “talents” been utilised by humans?

In Israel, several kibbutzim have for many years used earthworms to improve soil health, soil structure water retention and aeration.

In Montelimar, France, 35 000kgs of organic waste is collected daily by the Sovadec Institute for Organic Technology. This is converted by earthworms to 25 000kgs of vermicasts daily. These are used to produce potting soil, germination media, soil conditioners and other worm-based products. These products are used to grow large quantities of organic vegetables and cut flowers for the open market. This all helps to keep waste management costs to the townspeople down.

In India, the Bahawalkar Earthworm Research Institute in Pune State has designed and built many thousands of waterless toilets in which earthworms convert human waste to fertile worm casts.

The same Institute also operates Vermifilters which (they claim) converts raw liquid sewage into water fit for human consumption. This all in a very hot, dry region.

Also in India, the M. R. Morarko Research Foundation have in recent years enabled more than 300 000 subsistence farmers to reduce their overall production costs by more than 20% in under 5 years, by teaching them how to practise vermiculture. This has also led to a substantial increase in crop production, while improving the quality and shelf life of their crops.

Earthworms, dried and powdered, are a source of protein-rich food for livestock and pets, while all anglers know that fresh worms are a delicacy for most fish species.

In Wales, scientists have successfully used earthworms to remove contaminant heavy metals from old disused mines. This has helped to improve the health of people living near these mines.

In Australia, considerable research has been done into using earthworms to convert organic “wet waste” in cities to vermicompost. The University of New South Wales is a leader in this field of research. They set up a unit called the Recycled Organics Unit (ROU) to establish how to run large scale waste recycling efficiently. ROU has produced a booklet “Best Practice Guidelines to Managing Vermiculture Technologies,” which is an excellent blueprint for anyone wishing to get into large-scale organic waste management.

In Russia, vermiculture is practised on a huge scale, even more so than in U. S. A. Here, too, earthworms were used to clear the toxic waste after the Chernobyl disaster.

In Southern Africa, we have some catching up to do. Since late 2007, vermiculture practises have grown at such a rate that earthworms cannot be produced fast enough to keep up with the demand. EIGSA is working to rectify this by educating the public in as many ways as they can.

SOMETHING ABOUT EIGSA

In Southern Africa, we need to do much more research into the “indigenous” worm species. The aforementioned large worm species found near King William’s Town are not at all well known to the average South African.

There are very few plants on the planet that can survive without soil. Therefore it is essential that we take proper care of the soil. This is the only way to ensure that the plants needed by humans and animals will survive. It is very disturbing to anyone with concerns about the earth's well-being to see the on-going degradation of our soil by injudicious farming and gardening methods. Among the most serious consequences of these practises is the drop in numbers of the one little creature that is able to rebuild the soil—the *humble earthworm*.

Irrespective of how small a garden is or how large a farm is, the owner is in a position to do something to restore soil quality, or to maintain the soil health at a high level. This can be done either by introducing earthworms into the humus layer above the soil, or by making sure that *THE RIGHT CONDITIONS ARE CREATED* for them to thrive.

It was with these concerns in mind that EIGSA was formed in November 2004

EIGSA's primary functions are to educate, promote healthy soil –use techniques and foster interest, knowledge and further research into vermiculture and its benefits to mankind. We hope to help the growing numbers of our people to produce more, better food, while reducing their individual carbon footprints

Other important objectives of EIGSA are

To provide forums for people to contribute from their own experience with worms and vermiculture;

To put people in touch with suppliers of earthworms, their by-products and know-how

To distribute articles of interest to all on our mailing list. Several of these have been contributed by EIGSA members, others by courtesy of the print and other media.

EIGSA regularly conducts seminars and workshops in various centres. These have been very well received by the public.

We support several environmental groups in their endeavours to rebuild the depleted environment.

We support a number of organisations who are training people in vermiculture and permaculture

The National Committee (Natcom), comprising mostly Regional Group Convenors (RGC's) is the body which runs the affairs of EIGSA. The sub-continent is divided into regions, each of whose affairs are run by the local RGC and a local committee.

We subscribe to the 5R principles. These are:-

Rethink

We should all constantly re-think our approach to environmental matters and to our fellow man

Re-use

We should try to re-use everything until it can no longer be re-used in its present form

Re-cycle

Once it can no longer be re-used, then recycle it

Reduce

In order to minimise the impact of these materials on landfills, reduce (compact) it to the smallest possible size

Regenerate

Use organisms like earthworms, bacteria and other micro-organisms, to regenerate as much organic matter as you can.

MEMBERSHIP

EIGSA membership is open to all who would like to learn how to work with worms and also to those who have the ability to teach others to do this.

There is no membership fee. *All we ask is that our members work toward a better, healthier environment.*

We have recently decided to start a Junior Section. To help us with this, we ask that parents include the name, date of birth and gender of each child with their membership details.

To enrol, please send the following details to James Mehl (James..Mehl@FABI.up.ac.za) with a cc to Ken Reid (kareid@iafrica.com). If you do not have access to the Internet, please post your details to:

Ken Reid, EIGSA, P. O. Box 1577, Ferndale, 2160.

The details we need are:

Applicant's family name

Applicant's preferred name or first name

The same details for each other member of the family. Each minor child's name to be accompanied by date of birth and gender.

Physical address

For those living in small towns, villages and on farms, please add the nearest large centre, so that we can place you with the most suitable regional group.

Email address

Language preference. (Our usual communications ARE IN English, but if a member has difficulty with this, we will try to respond to correspondence in the preferred language.