

Worms wriggle their way into the recycling revolution

By Nate Thompson
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Those creepy red wrigglers in your garden have more uses than just scaring younger siblings.

Worms have leapt to the forefront of the recycling revolution. As people try to find a way to be more environmentally conscious, worms have suddenly become a valuable commodity.

Why worms, you ask? What could worms possibly have to do with recycling, you querv? Worms are the best recyclers around, and they've been doing it for longer than any other species on the planet.

In a process called vermicomposting (similar to regular composting except for the introduction of red worms) people throw their organic waste into a bin filled with worms. The worms eat this "garbage" and break it down into some of the most nutrient-rich fertilizer around. In gardening lingo worm castings are called "gardener's gold."

But not all waste can be used as worm food. Worms only eat organic waste; they don't eat plastic or metal, and they don't really like meat too much either. Coffee grounds, orange peels, crushed eggshells, bread crusts, and yard clippings are the stuff worms love to feast on. After they've burrowed through yesterday's lunch scraps, their castings can be used to grow some of the best organic fruits and vegetables around.

Current landfills are getting full and new sites are hard to come by. Nobody wants a landfill in their backyard, especially with problems such as leaks and odor. People around the world have started to rethink garbage. Nearly 18 percent of the garbage produced by an average American household is yard waste, and another seven to eight percent is food waste.

By seeing these as resources and using them accordingly, over one-fourth of a household's garbage would disappear.

Over one-fourth of that household's garbage would no longer be contributing to the landfill problem; it could be used

Urban Farm class audits University food waste level

By Nate Thompson
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University food services throws away almost one ton of food every day. Much of it is food that was taken by students but never eaten, and it goes straight into the landfill.

Some of the food they prepare is donated to Food for Lane County, which distributes it to the homeless. Regardless of where it goes, students pay for it every term in their room and board fees.

This information is the result of a project done by students taking the Urban Farm this term. Offered by the School of Architecture and Allied Arts, the Urban Farm is a class that offers students exposure to different types of 'Earth-friendly' lifestyles and values.

As a class project, a group of students decided to determine how much food the University wasted, by performing a food-waste audit. Originally, they planned to use this data to propose an alternative to simply dumping all the food waste in a landfill. After determining how much food was actually wasted, they had hoped to devise a vermicomposting program that would utilize this waste.

Vermicomposting is a process that is relatively new to the public eye. It uses the same concept as regular composting, except that it uses worms to eat the waste. Worms digest all kinds of organic matter and turn it into a high-nutrient fertilizer. Worms break down the organic waste faster than normal composting, and the final product is much higher in

nutrients. Vermicomposting also breaks the waste down to a size that is smaller and more accessible to plants' roots.

To perform the audit, the students were separated into teams, each of which measured the food waste of a certain facility on campus. These groups set up a collection site and asked that patrons disposed of their food in these instead of the normal garbage cans.

The winner of the "Worst Waster Award" was Carson Hall, which throws away approximately 620 pounds of food each day. Hamilton Complex was a close second, throwing away approximately 580 pounds of food every day. The University Inn, EMU Skylight, and Fountain Court were also audited. Collectively, they throw away over 350 pounds of food each day.

While it may seem unbelievable that students can waste so much food, it is also unbelievable that they are willing to pay to do it. Even resident students who don't waste food pay for it.

Each student pays the same amount for a cafeteria pass. So a 110-pound freshman who only eats one meal each day pays the same as a 280-pound senior who eats the equivalent of seven meals. And because all residents pay the same regardless of how much they eat, everyone pays for the waste in the form of higher room and board fees.

A debit system meant to reduce the waste has already been implemented at other colleges around the country.

to help that family grow its own food, which would probably be healthier than the vegetables available at the local supermarket (due to the amount of toxic agricultural chemicals used in agriculture today). That household would save money by having less garbage to dispose of, and it would decrease its dependence on a store for its fruits and vegetables.

And not only do worms eat your garbage, they do it quickly. Some researchers claim that red worms can consume up to twice their body weight every day. Add the fact that red worms reproduce quickly under good conditions, and their ability to rapidly convert waste into fertilizer becomes clear.

So if worms are so great, why haven't we heard of them before? Actually, the

idea has been around for quite a while. But in a society like ours where people are encouraged to buy now and pay later, the idea of a long-term waste management program like vermicomposting has been long overlooked.

Worms were praised for their role in creating prime soil as far back as 1896, when Charles Darwin wrote a book about soil ecology. In it he states, "Worms have played a more important role in the history of the world than most persons would at first suppose."

He was referring to worms' ability to aerate the soil by tunneling through it, while the same time breaking down organic matter into nutrients readily accessible to plants.

The idea of using worms as partners in waste management has come back into the public eye, and several large vermicomposting programs have been implemented across North America. The Kingdome in Seattle recently set up a vermicomposting program which uses all the vegetative food scraps produced by its caterer. Three harbor-front restaurants in Ontario, Canada, have joined forces to vermicompost their collective food scraps.

Many of the institutional vermicomposting projects are valued more for the money they save than they are for the fertilizer they produce. Instead of paying a garbage company to haul away organic waste, it is simply deposited in the nearest worm bin.

IRS offers several programs to respond to tax questions

By Meg Dedolph
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Internal Revenue Service is offering several programs to answer questions about filing income tax this year.

The IRS is providing tax help over the telephone. Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1-800-829-1040. Saturday help will be provided from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on April 2 and April 9.

Spanish-speaking tax assistants are also available, at 1-800-829-4672, from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

To get tax forms and other publications, call 1-800-829-3676, Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 6 a.m. to noon.

Forms, both federal and state, can also be picked up at most libraries and banks, including the Knight Library government document section and the US Bank branch on campus.

Drop-in help is available at the

Lane Community College main campus Tuesday through Thursday, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., in the Student Resource Center at 4000 E. 30th Ave. The downtown campus, at 1059 Willamette, is also offering tax help on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For students more interested in a quick refund, electronic filing is another option. Although an electronic filing allows the IRS to issue a refund more quickly, or in some cases, directly deposit it into the taxpayer's bank account.

It is more costly than filing taxes by mail. For example, the cost for electronic filing from H & R Block, an income tax preparation company, ranges from \$25 to \$39.

Low income taxpayers who earned less than \$23,050 in 1993 and whose children lived with them for more than six months may qualify for up to \$2,306 in refunds from the federal government.

part of the 1994 Public Interest Environmental Law Conference.

Speakers will include state representative Cynthia Wooten; Charles F. Hinkle, a legal advocate for the ACLU's battle over the OCA initiatives; and Federal Public Defender David K. Allen.

Panel focus on action against OCA

By Stephanie Sisson
Oregon Daily Emerald

A panel discussion about what is being done to stop the Oregon Citizen's Alliance will occur today from 4:30 to 6 p.m. in the EMU Fir Room.

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