

A Farmer's Friend

by Staff Writer

Not everyone loves worms. Some people think they are slimy and disgusting, but these small wriggling creatures are very important. In fact, we can thank earthworms for many of the delicious foods on our plates. Earthworms are good friends to the farmers who grow fruits and vegetables.

Earthworms can be found in most places around the world. They live their entire lives in soil. An earthworm has no eyes, ears, or nose. Instead, it senses its surroundings through the nerves along its body. These nerve cells help the earthworm crawl through the soil. Most earthworms are just a few inches long. However, if you traveled to Australia, you might see the longest earthworm in the world. The Gippsland earthworm can reach lengths of 12 feet!

Earthworms help farmers in several ways. As they crawl through soil, earthworms create burrows, or tunnels. Plants cannot grow if the soil is too dry and hard. The tunnels help air and water seep into the soil and reach plant roots. Earthworms also munch on leaves and other plant matter. The earthworms then pass the digested waste out of their bodies and into the soil. The waste from earthworms is filled with nutrients. This makes great fertilizer, or food, for the young, growing fruit and vegetable plants.

The earthworms in our gardens may be small, but they are very important. They help feed us and keep us healthy.

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. surroundings
2. burrows
3. seep
4. digested
5. nutrients

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1. " Instead, it senses its **surroundings** through the nerves along its body."

- a. hunger b. conditions around something, environment c. pain d. thoughts

2. "earthworms create **burrows**, or tunnels"

- a. small donkeys b. dams or blockages c. mushrooms d. animal holes, tunnels

3. "The tunnels help air and water **seep** into the soil"

- a. leak slowly, ooze b. flood, rush c. boil quickly d. bake

4. "The earthworms then pass the **digested** waste out of their bodies"

- a. high, lofty b. central, middle c. broken down food, castings d. harmful

5. "The waste from earthworms is filled with **nutrients**."

- a. nourishing substances, healthy materials b. poisons, toxins c. plastics d. ice