

# The Earthworm Book

How to Raise and Use Earthworms  
for Your Farm and Garden

by  
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The greatest of the early civilizations was doubtless that of the Egyptians, who developed a marvelously sophisticated culture and maintained it for four thousand years. The Egyptian experience alone is strong indication that a complex civilization cannot develop until the basic agricultural needs of its people are met. There is little time to pursue art and philosophy until bellies are full. The Nile Valley offered the richest agricultural land the world has ever known.

But can the extraordinary soil of the Nile Valley be due not to earthworm activity, but to the annual flooding of the Nile, which brings continuing renewal of the land by depositing nutrient-rich alluvium?

Again, not likely. The annual alluvial deposits are essential, to be sure, but without the extraordinary earthworm activity of the Nile Valley, even this rich soil would not be so lushly productive. A U.S. Department of Agriculture report of 1949 stated:

Investigations carried on in the valley of the White Nile in the Sudan indicate that the great fertility of the soil of this valley is due in large part to the work of earthworms. Observations are recorded from which it is estimated that the castings of earthworms on these soils during the six months of active growing season of the year amount to 239,580 pounds (119.79 tons) per acre.

Earthworm casts are the highest grade compost imaginable. As organic and mineral matter pass through the body of the earthworm, many of their nutrients are made available to growing plants. Thus, worm castings constitute a superb organic fertilizer and soil conditioner. Consider, then, the annual incorporation of *120 tons per acre of high-grade organic fertilizer* on Egypt's agricultural fields. This is approximately *ten times* the amount of castings that are deposited on good American and European agricultural lands, and goes far in explaining the unparalleled fertility of the Nile Valley.

There is also evidence that the ancient Egyptians were well aware of the earthworms' contribution to their prosperity. Cleopatra, in fact, decreed the earthworm to be a sacred animal, to be revered and protected by all her subjects—doubtless the only time in history that the earthworm has achieved so elevated a status.

The Egyptians. I have already mentioned that Cleopatra (69–30 B.C.) recognized the earthworm's contribution to the Egyptian agriculture by declaring this animal sacred. Egyptians were not allowed to remove so much as a single worm from the land of Egypt, and even farmers were not allowed to touch an earthworm for fear of offending the god of fertility. It is believed also that certain Egyptian priests devoted their full time to the study of the earthworm and its work. Unfortunately, the results of their efforts have not survived, or have not so far been uncovered for modern man to examine.