



Experiencing the worms. *Naturalist Dave Evason and Debra Eisenbise show children worms at work during Song and Story Fest.*

IN TOUCH

Worms teach kids at Shepherd's Spring

Every day, tons of food scraps go to landfills. At Shepherd's Spring Outdoor Ministries Center, Sharpsburg, Md., however, worms eat the garbage. The Center's mission statement, "A Source of Renewal Along One's Way," speaks not only to spiritual renewal, but to environmental renewal as well.

Campers scrape their worm-friendly food scraps into a designated container after every meal. Once a day, a group of campers takes the scraps to the worm bins and feeds the worms. The campers dig a trench in the bedding of one of the large plastic bins and bury the garbage in it.

The red worms that live in the bins eat the garbage and excrete it as "castings." By the end of the summer, the bedding and garbage have been transformed into a rich, dark, soil-like substance called "vermicompost" that is used in the Center's herb pots and flower gardens.

Naturalist Dave Evason lauds the educational value of the worms. "They teach campers the concept of recycling from beginning to end." Food waste is turned into plant food that turns plants into people food.

Many campers go home inspired. When fourth grader Jason McCoy needed to do a school report, he remembered the worms and did his report on recycling. When Ralph Detrick and Joyce Stoltzfus moved to their new house in an Elizabethtown, Pa., development where all the topsoil had been scraped away, they remembered the worms. They set up a worm bin and are using the rich castings to quickly build up their soil for flowerbeds and plantings.

At the Potomac Highlands Song and Story Fest held at Shepherd's Spring in June, the preschool children present were treated to the experience of watching new bins being started. Four-year-old Brendan McDowell was so entranced with the worms that his mother, Terrie, made plans to start a bin at home. "What better way for him to see the regeneration process," she said. "What we teach him now will carry into his adult life. This is wonderful!"

Anyone interested in learning more about composting with worms can get a good start at www.wormwoman.com.—Peggy Reiff Miller