The History of Worms and Worm Farming

When many of us think of worms, we think of the few pink earthworms that hang out in the garden, strolling through the soil and showing their faces after a heavy rain. We don't often stop to think about the history involved in these legless creatures. Some people even put these guys to work for profit and natural soil care through a process known as worm farming.

So how long have worms really been around? To take a look at the history of worm farming, we have to go way back before the age of man. Worms have been around almost since the beginning of time. Even in the age of the dinosaurs, earthworms worked hard breaking down excrement and waste. Their job was to produce a substance more useful to the soil. In turn, the level of fertility of the soil would remain high promoting a better rate of growth.

From 51 and 30 B.C., the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra VII realized the importance the worms played in the fertilization of the Nile. The export of worms from Egypt was then banned and became a crime punishable by death. For this reason, the Nile has been reported to contain the most fertile soil in the world even today.

Many years later, Charles Darwin published "The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Actions of Worms with Observations on their Habits" in 1881. He mentions here that the plough was one of the best inventions made by man. It changed the lives of farmers everywhere.

The worm however, has been doing the same job long before man although later they were once regarded as a pest. It was thought that worms destroyed plant life, chewing through the roots of crops. In reality, the worms plough through the Earth carrying water and air beneath the soil aerating and fertilizing it. Darwin continued to study earthworms, their habits and their benefits to man for over forty years. He even went so far as to label these crawlers as one of the most important creatures on earth.

During the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s chemistry was discovered and Darwin's studies were cast aside. Worm farming as a natural method for ploughing was ignored. Instead, man-made products were used for the job for a quicker more efficient way of producing a larger yield of growth.

Chemists produced fertilizers that increased the growth of crops. These fertilizers also damaged the soil, requiring even more fertilizers to continue to produce this increased growth yield. Other chemicals such as pest sprays and poisons have caused the decrease in the population of earthworms in the soil,

thereby causing a fall in the fertility of the soil.

Because of the availability and ease of use, fertilizers and pesticides have been primarily used in crops across the world. However, some farmers began to culture their own worms on a smaller scale. Worm farming, or vermiculture, is the use of earthworms to aerate soil and change organic matter into compost. It only became a commercial process in the 1970s.

Worm farmers experience fluctuations in production and revenue depending on market requirements and demand. While commercial worm farmers still exist and function efficiently, many individuals have begun to establish their own methods of farming worms. This has been made easier through readily available worm farming supplies and equipment to encourage a more natural way of producing well fertilized soil and for composting waste.

The views about worms and how they effect the environment have changed dramatically over the years. Whether they're held sacred or regarded as nasty slimy critters, worms have proved to be hardy and beneficial enough to last this long; they're probably going to hang around for many years to come.