

SUN-TRIBUNE PEOPLE



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Willowgrove Primary School kindergarten students Taylor Chan (from left), Jesse Black, Grace Whelan, Sage Brady, Josef Kay and Alexander Dispolo check their red wiggler worms in a composter at the McCowan Road campus. Compost created is used in the planting of milkweed.

Classroom pets teach environmental lesson

BY SANDRA BOLAN
Staff Writer

Long gone are the days when the classroom pet is a fish, gerbil, hamster, budgie or even a bunny rabbit.

Now, in at least one area school, the classroom pet is a bin full of 400 worms.

Late last year, Willowgrove Primary School decided it wanted to enhance its environmental educational curriculum and added an indoor vermicomposter to its junior/senior kindergarten class.

"We're surrounded by nature and it's a very big part of our curriculum," said Gerald Reesor-Grooters, the McCowan Road school's kindergarten teacher. "You can't always cage nature, move it inside and look

at it. With worms you can."

Vermicomposting is composting, which is the aerobic decomposition of biodegradable organic matter, but with the assistance of red wiggler worms.

"The resulting vermicompost, or worm cast, is rich in nutrients," according to Cathy Nesbitt, owner and operator of Cathy's Crawly Composters, which supplied Willowgrove with the worms and educational material for the students.

"It's more valuable to farmers, landscapers and home gardeners than raw manure or traditional compost. Worm castings conserve moisture and improve soil conditions."

Vermicomposting is ideal for people who live in apartments and condos, as well as for classrooms,

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as it only requires a plastic bin with a lid and air holes at the top and bottom, bedding made of crushed egg shells, potting soil, shredded paper, water and a bunch of red wiggler worms.

"The type of worm is important. They're not all composting worms," Ms Nesbitt noted.

Everyday, Mrs. Reesor-Grooters' class adds their organic food scraps, such as apple cores and banana peels, into the bin, so the worms can start eating their way through it.

About two pounds of red wigglers will recycle about one pound of organic matter in 24 hours. Which means in about three or four

months, Willowgrove's worms will have created enough cast-offs, or compost, for the class to use in its planting of milkweed outside their room.

"Because of the spraying, the milkweed is in decline and with it goes the population of the Monarch butterfly," Mrs. Reesor-Grooters noted. "It's nice to have a long-term (project)...instead of just the worms."

Educating children about the value of composting in this manner, not only teaches them about the environment, it also gets them eating more fruits and vegetables.

"Some teachers have reported the kids will eat better because they want to feed the worms," Ms Nesbitt said. "It's a nice hidden extra benefit."

Whitchurch-Stouffville News Digest

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100 puppy mill dogs up for adoption

About 100 Bichon, Pekingese, Papillon and Lhasa Apso-type dogs seized from a suspected puppy mill are available for adoption. Some are at the Ontario SPCA York Region Branch in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The dogs were left to roam in their own excrement, with dirty and severely matted fur. They were found in the former Sydenham Township on Dec. 1, 2008. Many of the dogs were in need of immediate medical care.

All dogs have since received medical treatment and have recovered well.

Criminal charges are pending against two Grey-Bruce county residents. If convicted, the accused can face fine ranging from the prohibition of owning animals, up to 18 months in jail or a maximum fine of \$10,000.

The Ontario SPCA York Region Branch is at 16586 Woodbine Ave., just south of Vivian Road. Call 905-898-7122 ext. 306, www.yorkregion.ontariospca.ca

Stouffville Lenten dinners cooking for 14th year

Dinner's on again during Lent at Christ Church Stouffville.

The Sunset Boulevard congregation has hosted the suppers for 14 years.

They'll be held on the next four Wednesdays, March 4 to April 1, from 5 to 7 p.m.

"As always the dinner is free, but most people feel more comfortable leaving a donation in the basket," church spokesperson Gail Wood said.

The menu will include beef stew, ham and scalloped potatoes, chicken pot pie, shepherd's pie and pork chops, depending on the week.

For more information, call the church at 905-640-6659.

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