Wiggly Worms

April showers are hopefully bringing the May flowers, but rain showers also bring worms. Why do worms come out of the ground when it rains?

Earthworms are invertebrates (do not have skeletons) belonging to the phylum Annelida. They maintain their shape by water pressure (hydrostatic pressure) and they move by stretching and contracting. Their muscles push and pull them along. Earthworms collect their food by eating soil and the organic material in it. They digest the organic matter (leaves, plants, etc.) and their poop is called castings. Worm castings are a great fertilizer. In all their digging and squirming in the soil, worms are like little ploughs or rototillers, breaking up the soil and making it soft. They mix up the soil, bringing minerals and nutrients up to the top from deeper down.

Touch a worm, its skin is moist. Worms need to live in moist soil. If the soil gets too wet, the worms can drown. That's why they climb onto the grass when it rains. When it's very wet, they can easily move on the sidewalk. But when the rain stops, the worms can quickly dry out. When they're dry they can't move and they die.

Worms are strong! Have you ever tried to pull a worm out of its hole? Worms have segmented bodies and each segment has nearly invisible hairy bristles called chaetae (pronounced KEE-tee). The chaetae

help the worm grip the walls of the tunnel it is burrowing and allow it to move forward. Pet a worm from nose to tail and it will feel smooth. Pet a worm from tail to head and you can feel the roughness of the chaetae.
Giant earthworms, found in Australia and Africa, can reach over 6 feet long when stretched out!

Worm activities. Take a walk right after (or even during) a rain. Young kids can count worms. Kids of all ages can gently rescue worms by gently picking them up and putting them onto a lawn. Put them (or gently toss them) at least six feet from the sidewalk so they don't crawl back again.
Watch a robin pull a worm from the lawn or soil.
When you're walking around worms walk softly, they can't hear you but they can feel the vibrations you make when you step.
Turn over a shovel full of dirt and look for worms. Try, gently, pulling a worm from the ground. It's stronger than you thought, isn't it! Watch the worms crawl back into the ground.
Make a compost pile! Start with about 6 inches of dirt. Then layer leaves, kitchen waste (plant material, not meat scraps), then a couple inches of dirt. It takes about a year, sometimes two, but worms will turn kitchen waste into marvelous garden soil!

Make a wormery. Fill a 1 quart glass jar half full with moist dirt. Add about a half inch layer of small pieces of lettuce or other green leaves. Add more soil (use a different color of soil if possible) until the jar is about ¾ full. Sprinkle some crunched up leaves and/or more lettuce on top. Pour in 3-5 tablespoons of water—you want the soil to be moist but not wet. Water should NOT pool on the

bottom. Carefully add 6-8 worms. (Only 2 if you find large pencil size nightcrawlers.) Cover with a dark cloth and keep in a cool dark place. Check your worms every day. Watch how the soil layers get mixed up. After 7 to 10 days, release your worms back to the wild.

A good worm website: https://www.ecowatch.com/10-interesting-facts-about-earthworms-1881871982.html

Worm books:
Nonfiction: Wonderful Worms by Linda Glaser, Wiggling Worms at Work by Wendy Pfeffer, Yucky Worms by Vivian French
Fiction: Diary of a Worm by Doreen Cronin, How to Eat Fried Worms by Thomas Rockwell