

## Compost worm (*Eisenia veneta*)



### Habitat

Usually found in garden compost but can also occur in wet, decaying leaf litter, organic-rich soils and manure heaps

### Diet

Rotting vegetation

### Size

Typical size of adult is 7cm

### Characteristics

- The whole body is stripy on its upper surface when moving
- The upper surface has dark red bands, with a pale pink or yellowish band in between
- Saddle usually paler than the rest of the body

## Brandling worm (*Eisenia fetida*)



### Habitat

Usually found in garden compost but also occurs in wet, decaying leaf litter, organic-rich soils and manure heaps

### Diet

Eats rotting vegetation

**Size**

Typical size of adult is 6cm

**Characteristics**

- The whole body is stripy on its upper surface
- The upper surface has dark red bands, with a narrower pale pink or yellowish band in between
- Saddle usually a similar colour to the rest of the body
- Can exude an unpleasant-smelling yellowish fluid when handled

## Green worm (*Allolobophora chlorotica*)

<http://www.opalexplorenature.org/?q=node/375>



**Allolobophora chlorotica - Green morph**

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Occurs in two different forms, a muddy greenish-yellow colour, and a pale grey colour.

**Distribution**

Widely distributed and often the most numerous earthworm in all but the most acid of habitats

**Habitat**

Lives in the topsoil, often among plant roots

**Diet**

Eats soil

**Size**

Small to medium-sized species. Typical adult size up to 5cm in length when not moving.

**Characteristics**

- Yellow ring towards the head
- Often curls up in the hand
- Both colour forms have three pairs of sucker-like discs on the underside of alternate segments of the saddle (not always easy to see)
- Can produce large amounts of yellow fluid from pores along its body when disturbed

## Redhead worm (*Lumbricus rubellus*)

**Habitat**

Widespread species found in most habitats. Lives in the topsoil and leaf litter.

**Diet**

Thought to feed on decaying leaf litter fragments

**Size**

Typical size of adult is 6.5cm

**Characteristics**

- The upper surface of the body, from the first segment to the saddle, is entirely dark in colour (reddish brown)
- Sometimes flattens its tail into a paddle shape
- Male pores are not visible

## Black-headed worm (*Aporrectodea longa*)



A large species that lives in permanent burrows, unlike some earthworms, which don't maintain their tunnels. Can produce piles of worm casts or faeces, sometimes more than 5cm tall, around the entrance of their burrows.

#### **Habitat**

Widespread. Moderately common (5 to 20 worms per square metre), often in alkaline soils in open areas such as gardens, grassland and cultivated soils.

#### **Diet**

Eats soil

#### **Size**

Typical adult size about 12cm in length when not moving

#### **Characteristics**

- Long and thin
- The upper surface of the body, from the first segment to the saddle, is entirely dark in colour
- Often a dark purplish head, the rear end of the body is often much paler
- Visible male pores (see earthworm key for image)

## **Lob worm (*Lumbricus terrestris*)**



Britain's largest earthworm, also known as the common earthworm.

#### **Distribution**

Very common and widespread. Can reach populations of 20 to 40 worms per square metre in an average garden lawn

**Habitat**

Live in deep vertical burrows, which can be up to 3m deep. They can anchor themselves by broadening their tail to grip the sides of the burrow.

**Diet**

Emerge at night to feed on fallen leaves and other decaying plant material

**Size**

Typical adult size about 12cm in length when not moving

**Characteristics**

- Long but very stout, often as thick as a pencil
- Upper surface of body, from first segment to saddle, is dark in colour
- Male pores are raised and conspicuous (see earthworm key for image)
- Sometimes flattens its tail into a wide paddle shape (see earthworm key for image)

## Octagonal-tailed worm (*Dendrobaena octaedra*)

**Habitat**

Locally abundant. Lives in leaf litter.

**Diet**

Leaf litter

**Size**

Typical size of adult is 3cm

**Characteristics**

- Short in length
- Upper surface of the body, from the first segment to the saddle, is entirely dark in colour
- Visible male pores (see earthworm key for image)
- The tail is octagonal in cross-section but this is very difficult to see in live earthworms

## Chestnut worm (*Lumbricus castaneus*)



#### **Habitat**

Common and widespread, found in many habitats. Lives in leaf litter and under logs.

#### **Size**

Typical size of adult is 4cm

#### **Characteristics**

- Short in length
- Upper surface of body, from the first segment to the saddle, is entirely dark in colour (chestnut brown)
- Male pores not visible (see earthworm key for image)
- A raised whitish gland is visible on the underside between the saddle and the head (see earthworm key for image)

## **Little tree worm (*Satchellius mammalis*)**



#### **Habitat**

Widespread in many habitats, from woodlands and field margins to marshy habitats and river banks, but seldom abundant. Lives in leaf litter.

#### **Diet**

Leaf litter

#### **Size**

Very small. Typical size of adult is 3cm.

#### **Characteristics**

- Very short in length
- Upper surface of body, from the first segment to the saddle, is entirely dark in colour
- Male pores very obvious (see earthworm key for image)
- Swelling around the male pores is broad, covering the entire width of adjacent segments (see key for image)

## Rosy-tipped worm (*Aporrectodea rosea*)



### Habitat

Widespread and found in most habitats. Can be locally abundant. Lives in the topsoil.

### Diet

Eats soil

### Size

Typical size of adult is 5cm

### Characteristics

- The body from first segment to the saddle is entirely or partly pale in colour
- Rosy pink or pale pink head (up to the male pores)
- Saddle usually orange
- Often has two or more whitish raised pads before the male pores (see earthworm key for image)

## Grey worm (*Aporrectodea caliginosa*)



A pale earthworm that is often easy to identify because of the different shades of colour along its body.

#### **Distribution**

Very common throughout the UK

#### **Habitat**

Lives in non-permanent horizontal burrows in topsoil. Rarely found in leaf litter.

#### **Diet**

Eats soil

#### **Characteristics**

- Front end of the worm is usually in three distinct shades (see earthworm key for image)
- Saddle pads usually form a two-humped ridge across three segments, but this is difficult to see (see earthworm key for image)
- Typical adult size about 6cm in length when not moving

## **Blue-grey worm (Octolasion cyaneum)**



#### **Habitat**

Found in pasture and arable land, gardens and woodlands. Lives in the topsoil.

#### **Diet**

Eats soil

**Size**

Typical size of adult is 10cm

**Characteristics**

- The body from the first segment to the saddle is partly or entirely pale in colour
- Can vary from faint blue-grey to a pale rosy pink colour
- Distinct yellow tail (last four or five segments)
- May have a lilac blue line on the upper surface

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- Can produce large amounts of yellow fluid from pores along its body when disturbed

## Less common earthworms

### Can't identify your worm?

<http://www.opalexplorenature.org/?q=node/376>



*Allolobophora eiseni*

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• *Aporectodea icterica*



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- *Eiseniella tetraeda*



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- *Lumbricus festivus*

If you have an adult earthworm that you can't identify, it could be one of the 14 other species in the UK. These are less common, and many of them are only known by their scientific name.

Because the earthworm key in the survey guide does not cover these species, accurate identification is difficult and they should all be recorded as unidentified when submitting results.

Below is a list of the 14 less common earthworm species. See some of these earthworms in the slideshow on this page.

- *Allolobophora cupulifera*
- *Allolobophoridella eiseni*
- *Aporrectodea limicola*
- *Dendrobaena attemsi*
- *Dendrobaena pygmaea*
- *Dendrodrilus rubidus* - bank worm or gilt-tail worm
- *Eiseniella tetraeda* - square-tailed worm
- *Helodrilus oculatus*
- *Lumbricus festivus*
- *Lumbricus friendi*
- *Murchieona muldali* - glass worm
- *Octolasion tyrtaeum* - white worm
- *Aporrectodea icterica*
- *Dendrobaena hortensis*