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## Teas to Nourish Your Plants

### #1 in Series: Worm Tea

Worm tea. Manure tea. Herbal extract tea. Compost tea.

Just what are all these home-made “teas”? Do they actually fertilize plants? Which one is best? How much do I apply? Do I dilute them? Can I make them myself? If you are feeling confused, I understand! In this series, I’ll help you compare and prepare these liquid fertilizers.

Overall, these teas definitely deliver benefit to your vegetables, herbs, flowers, lawn, trees, shrubs, trees, and houseplants. How? The teas feed both your plants and your soil food web. They provide necessary nutrients and soil biology. These teas are not highly concentrated fertilizers. They nourish gently, so I recommend that you administer a few doses over the growing season. I call this “the many small meals program”, rather than one big meal in the spring. As summer progresses, your crops are bulking up and, and need extra food, just like a hungry teenage boy. Give those growing crops another meal in the form of tea. Since these teas are liquid, you can simply pour them on. Teas can provide some or all of your garden’s fertilizer needs.

#### #1: Worm Tea:

In a typical worm bin, red wiggler worms digest and decompose kitchen waste, damp newspaper strips, and other organic matter. The red wigglers poop, and these accumulated “castings” are the vermicompost. This product is a crumbly, organic material. It is sweet-smelling and loaded with nutrients. It’s very much like your finished compost from your outdoor compost heap, but vermicompost usually contains much higher populations of beneficial soil microbes per cupful.

Worm tea can mean two things: 1) the leachate or excess liquid that drains from a worm bin faucet, or 2) worm castings (solids) mixed with water to make a tea. I have recently learned that the leachate can have undesirable levels of non-beneficial microbes from the unfinished composting process. So I correct my previous writing. Worm leachate tea can sicken or kill your plants, so don’t use it that way. Just pour it back into the worm bin.

Instead, I recommend making vermi-tea from the castings of a well-worked through area of the worm bin. Scoop into a bucket, and dilute this concentrate by mixing about 1 part castings to 5 parts water. The result is very muddy tea. Ladle this slurry as a drench. Or, drench plus do a foliar feeding. Simply strain some vermicompost tea, put it in a watering can, hold it above the plant, and sprinkle the foliage with your vermi-tea. To review the terms,

A DRENCH means to soak the soil that is above the root zone. For trees, this means apply to the drip line. For vegetables, herbs, flowers, and small fruit crops, apply at the base of the plants. Use a watering can or pour from a container.

A FOLIAR FEED means to apply the liquid fertilizer to the leaves or foliage. Plants can take in nutrients through their leaves as well as their roots. If you use a sprayer, you'll need to strain the tea well.

So enjoy nourishing your plants with vermi-tea's supply of nutrients and microbes. While vermi-tea contains a small amount of beneficial microbes compared to actively aerated compost tea, it is an excellent home-made fertilizer and mid-season boost.

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Ellen Vande Visse operates Good Earth Garden School and offers educational workshops through [www.goodearthgardenschool.com](http://www.goodearthgardenschool.com)