

Eco-Friendly Landscaping

Nematodes - Making Nitrogen Available to your Plants

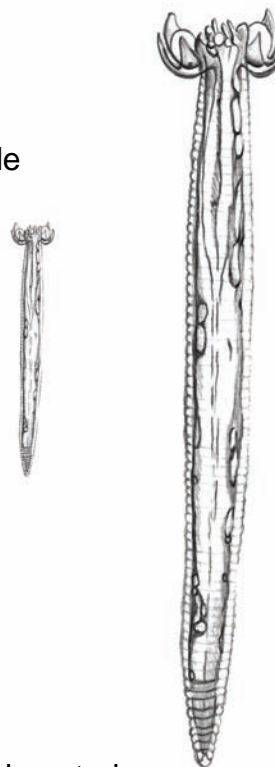
Lauren Rama

Some nematodes have given the whole tribe a bad name. This is because they eat roots of plants and are harmful to the plants. Most nematodes, though, are beneficial to plants. Nematodes are tiny worms that are usually not visible - the larger ones look like small hairs. They are the second most dominant form of animal life on the planet (after arthropods - tiny mites) in terms of their numbers. Scientists have identified 20,000 species of nematodes and speculate that there are many more not yet identified.

In your soil and on the surfaces of plant leaves nematodes eat bacteria, fungi, and other nematodes, making the minerals and nutrients stored in these other microbes available to the plants through their roots or leaf surfaces. Nematodes have great digestive systems for minerals - bonding each ion in a mineral molecule to a protein molecule - thus making the minerals much easier for plants to absorb and use. Nematodes are the most aggressive of the micro-organisms found in soil. Under the microscope, you can see nematodes squirm and attack other microbes. They are also the most mobile and carry bacteria and sometimes fungi through the soil, helping to spread beneficial micro-organisms.

In one teaspoon of healthy soil 40 - 50 nematodes can be found of various types. To enrich your soil with nematodes, add good compost. Compost made with some portion of horse manure seems to be the richest source of nematodes. Using compost rather than chemicals (which kill nematodes) is the most effective way to develop healthy soil, rich with micro-organisms like nematodes. Nematodes are active and powerful micro-organisms who are an essential part of our life on earth.

Bacterial Nematode



Feeding Predatory Nematode



Lauren Rama runs *Eco-yards™*, a landscape design, installation, and organic spray business. She is writing a book: *Eco-yards : Simple Steps to Earth-Friendly Landscapes* due out in June, 2008. Lauren writes a column for the *Friends of Fish Creek* newsletter.

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