KEEPING BLACKWORMS ALIVE

By Chase Klinesteker

Blackworm container in refrigerator

THE PROBLEM

Blackworms are an excellent food for fishes, but they usually require daily rinsing to be kept alive. If the water is not changed daily, it turns red and putrid, even if kept in the refrigerator, and the worms die. Yet when I feed the worms to fish in tanks, they live for a long time, and sometimes even reproduce there. Instructions are to rinse daily, keep none or less than ½ inch water over them, and put them in the refrigerator at 40-50 degrees. This has worked fairly well for me, but sometimes I am gone for a few days, and the worms usually die if I don't rinse them. I wisely refuse to ask my wife to rinse the worms daily! It seemed that the main problem was that the worms were not getting enough oxygen, so I decided to try adding more water and aerating the worms-----in the refrigerator!

THE TEST

Our basement refrigerator is very old, and we use it mainly to keep pop and miscellaneous items, so an airline could be placed through a break in the refrigerator door seal to the worms. The worm box is a clear plastic 16" by 11" sweater box, which will hold 4-5 inches of water over the worms (about 3 gallons). This will easily accommodate a pound of worms. A stone is attached on the airline end to hold it on the bottom, and moderate

aeration is used. The box top is kept on, allowing just the airline to enter. My first test of this idea was during a 4-day fishing trip where the worms would not be rinsed. At that point, I had just gotten a pound of worms and did not want to lose them, so I put them in the box with 5 inches of water and aeration. It worked great! When I returned 4 days later, the water was slightly darker, but there were few if any dead worms. Also, no worms crawled out of the box into the refrigerator due to the deep water. One disadvantage of this setup is that there will be more ice buildup on the refrigerator coils due to increased humidity, so I recommend this setup only in a secondary refrigerator, not your primary one where most of your food is kept. I still need to work on improving this setup, but it seems to work for up to a week without needing a water change. Depending on the quality of the worms when received, I have kept worms for over 2 months in this manner.

Rinsing the worms should be done every day for 2-3 days after you first get them to clean them out. Slime can build up on the sides of the container so I use a toothbrush to loosen it and then gently swirl my hand on the bottom to clean it and get the debris in suspension. Let the worms settle and then pour off the water and debris and replace with cold tapwater. The chlorine and temperature change does not seem to bother the worms.

Areating worms with weight on airline