Key to common British earthworms of amenity grasslands

By David T. Jones and Chris N. Lowe

There are 26 British species of earthworm. This guide covers the seven most common species that occur in grass lawns and playing fields. It does not include the red stripy earthworms that occur in compost heaps, other species that occur in gardens, or woodland species.

Start here

Is it more than 2cm long, AND does it have a clearly developed saddle?

The saddle is usually a different colour to the rest of the body, and slightly wider

It is not a mature earthworm - you can’t identify it with this guide. At least 50% of the earthworms you find will be immatures.

Turn over

Is the body from the first segment to the saddle partly or entirely pale in colour (whitish, pink, grey or greenish)? It may have some reddish or dark segments

Yes

NO

NO

YES

Is the upper surface of the body, from the first segment to the saddle, entirely dark in colour (dark red, purplish red or chestnut brown)?

Yes

NO

YES

Are the male pores visible?

Yes

NO

YES

Is the earthworm longer than 8cm when NOT moving?

YES

NO

NO

Redhead worm Lumbricus rubellus

Hint

Line drawings show typical sizes of the adult worm

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Blue-grey worm Octolasion cyaneum

Distinct yellow tail
Can vary from faint blue-grey to a pale rosy pink colour
May have a lilac-blue line on the upper surface

Green worm Allolobophora chlorotica

Hints
Two colour forms exist: pale and green
Can exude a yellow fluid when handled
Often curls up in the hand

Rospy-tipped worm Aporrectodea rosea

Hints
Head usually rosy pink or pale pink up to the male pores
The saddle is usually orange, and can be wider towards the rear end
Often has 2 or more whitish raised pads before the male pores

Grey worm Aporrectodea caliginosa

Hint
The head up to the saddle is usually in three distinct shades: pink or pale grey, then whitish, and then darker grey

Grey worm Aporrectodea caliginosa

Written by David T. Jones, Imperial College London and Natural History Museum, and Chris N. Lowe, University of Central Lancashire.
Photographs by Harry Taylor, Natural History Museum and Chris N. Lowe.
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