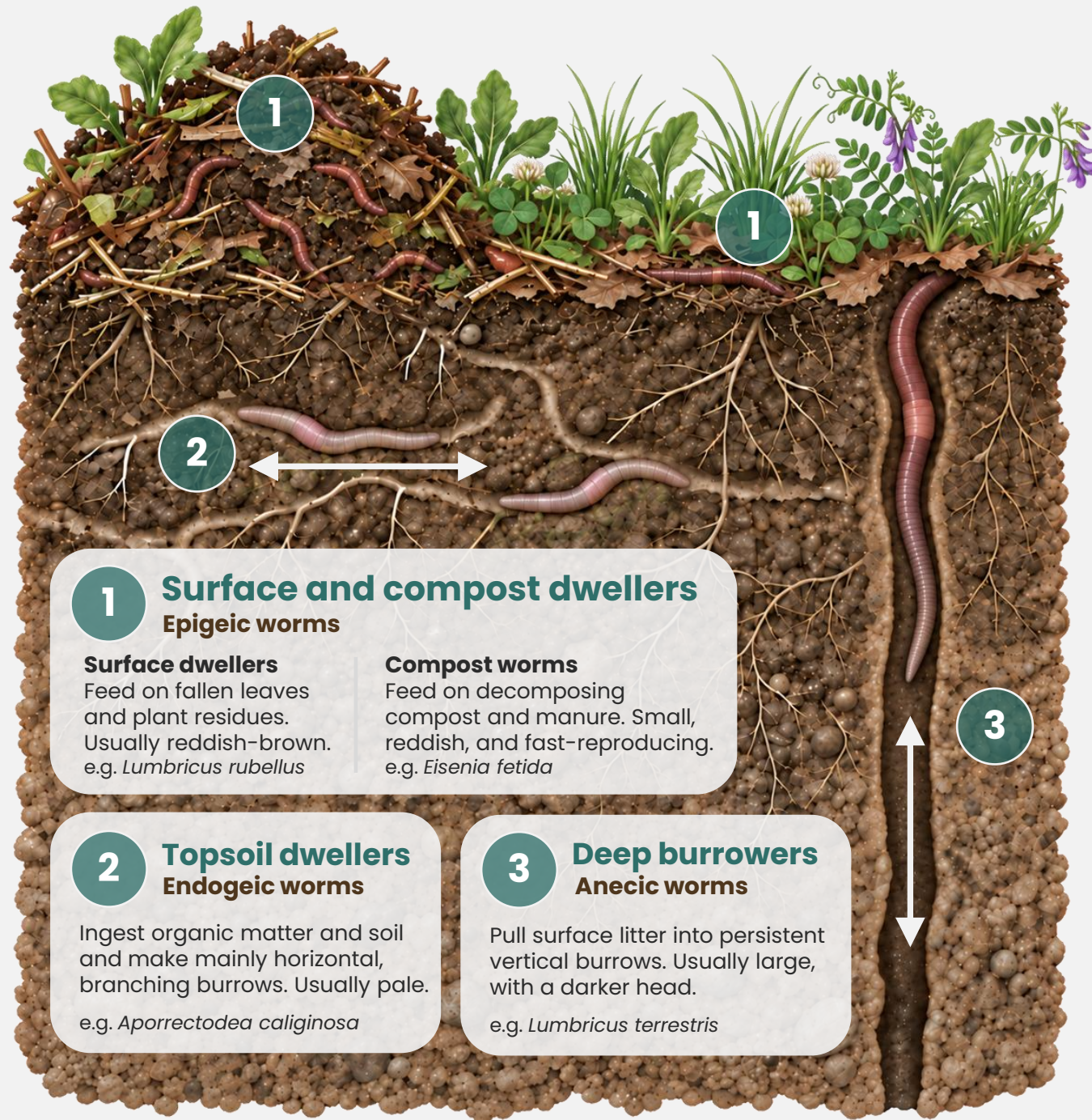




1 Surface and compost dwellers Epigeic worms

Surface dwellers

Feed on fallen leaves and plant residues. Usually reddish-brown. e.g. *Lumbricus rubellus*

Compost worms

Feed on decomposing compost and manure. Small, reddish, and fast-reproducing. e.g. *Eisenia fetida*

2 Topsoil dwellers Endogeic worms

Ingest organic matter and soil and make mainly horizontal, branching burrows. Usually pale.

e.g. *Aporrectodea caliginosa*

3 Deep burrowers Anecic worms

Pull surface litter into persistent vertical burrows. Usually large, with a darker head.

e.g. *Lumbricus terrestris*

Earthworms at work

Three groups, many functions



≈ 5 400

known earthworm species worldwide

≈ 400

in Europe

18×

the total weight of earthworms

on soil with long-term farmyard manure use compared to no manure.*

≈ 2×

as many earthworm species

in grass-clover strips after three years compared with cropped soil.**



Some healthy forest soils naturally have few or no earthworms. Fungi, springtails and other soil life break down organic matter.

How can I help earthworms thrive?



Protect soil moisture
maintain soil cover



Provide organic food
retain plant residues



Reduce soil disturbance
limit intensive tillage



Co-funded by
the European Union

Explore more at rege-farms.eu/infographics

Worldwide species estimate: Brown et al. (2025). European species estimate: FIBL (2022) * UK trial: 109 versus 6 g/m². Sizmur et al. (2017). ** Average species count per soil sample across UK fields. Llanos et al. (2025).

Author: Lucia Baľáková, Živá Záhrada