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CULTURING VINEGAR EELS (*Turbatrix aceti*)

Equipment required:

- Vinegar Eel Starter Culture
- Ventilated culturing container
- Cider vinegar
- Aged tap water or bottled water
- Cut apple pieces

Vinegar eels are tiny non-parasitic nematode worms that were widespread in vinegar supplies until the advent of pasteurisation. They are fully aquatic living and breeding in vinegar and can survive in water for very long periods (but not breed). For this reason they are a great food for obligate live feeding fish fry as well as some amphibian larvae (notably caudates and hymenochirus).

To start with you need a suitable culturing container – 2L soft drink bottles, large glass jars or larger bottles. You will need to make ventilation holes in the lid or your worms will suffocate.

Into this container place a 50:50 mix of cider vinegar and water. You can use other vinegars but the results are often not as good. Chop an apple into quarters and add one or two pieces to your bottle. Then add your starter culture to this mixture. The culture is maintained at room temperature and after a week or so will be ready to harvest. The worms tend to congregate near the surface of the culture and make the culture look slightly cloudy.

Remove the worms using a pipette or turkey baster and pass through coffee filter paper to separate worms from their culture medium. Just top up the culture with more vinegar/water if you take a large volume.

It is wise to make another culture after a few months, using your original culture. Old cultures can often be revived using a teaspoon of sugar and dried active yeast.