ACTIVITY 9

A Great Recipe for Garbage

Show children that organic garbage can be composted to create new "living" soil.

What you need

Fish tank or Box lined with plastic, Long-handled spoon or stick, Water, Small pieces of food waste, Leaves or grass, "Living" dirt (with earthworms!), Gloves or plastic bags, Hand lens (optional), Shredded paper (optional).

Time

40 minutes to construct the compost
2 or more weeks to observe changes

Get Ready! Gather pieces of garbage to compost. (Don't compost oily items or dairy or meat products.) Order earthworms through gardening or science catalogs, composting companies, or a local bait shop. You may want to have chil

Get Ready! Gather pieces of garbage to compost. (Don't compost oily items or dairy or meat products.) Order earthworms through gardening or science catalogs, composting companies, or a local bait shop. You may want to have children dig up worms from a garden or park. For a Composting Fact Sheet, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Ecology Center, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, California 94702.

1 **Get Started** by showing your kids the garbage you have collected. Tell children that instead of dumping food and plant waste, people can compost their garbage. Composting is like a recipe for turning garbage into rich soil for growing plants. The ingredients are soil, pieces of garbage, air, water. Adding earthworms helps speed the process! Ask them what they think worms in the soil eat. Will they eat the garbage?

Tip: *Some children may be uncomfortable with worms. Others may be fascinated with them. If possible, provide children with books about worms. Set aside time for children to handle the worms before putting them into the compost.*

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2 Place the mixture in a box lined with plastic in this order:

1. soil (with worms)
2. food waste (fruit and vegetable peels, egg shells, tea and coffee grounds)
3. plant waste (grass clippings, weeds, twigs)
4. water
5. soil (and so on)

Have children water the compost until it is moist and cover the top and sides of the compost. (Earthworms prefer being in the dark.)

Tip: *Use the paper you've saved from previous activities to line the compost box (along with the plastic).*

3 Over the next few days, your composters can take turns watering the compost or stirring in any extra garbage.

4 **Close** at the end of at least 3 weeks by having the children observe the changes that have begun. (If possible, wait for 2 weeks more!) How has the mixture changed? What happens to the food that worms eat? Ask what the compost can be used for (growing plants).

Tip: *While children are waiting to work with the mixture, they can create an illustrated poster indicating what can and can't be composted. (Beef, chicken, fish, pork, buttery or oily scraps, and dairy products should not be composted.)*

WATCH IT ROT!

Children can gather a few scraps of food and place them in sealable clear plastic bags. Label each bag and tape it to a wall. Check the bags after several days, and then after a

The total garbage each adult in America throws out in a year weighs about as much as 25 children (about 1,200 lbs.)!

of food and place them in sealable clear plastic bags. Label each bag and tape it to a wall. Check the bags after several days, and then after a week. What is happening to the food? Tell children that tiny creatures are eating the food and breaking it down into tiny pieces. After a week, empty the bags into the compost. Children can also place compost in milk cartons and use it to grow plants.

Materials: Food scraps, sealable clear plastic bags

Try doing this activity with activities 4 (A Single Patch of Earth) and/or 10 (Team Trash Crafts.)

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Words to Know!

Composting: a way of turning plant and food wastes into soil. The process is quickened by the action of worms

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