



Post Field Trip
COMPOSTING 101
Classroom Activity Sheet

Objective: Students will learn about the process of composting, what is involved, and why gardeners make compost. The students will then extend the learning process to a hands-on activity.

Perhaps you have heard the word “compost” but did not understand what it meant. Simply stated compost is material that formerly was organic matter (came from a once living organism such as a plant or animal) and is now decomposed and can be used to make garden soil better for growing fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Compost allows the roots of the plants spread out more easily and farther and also contains nutrients for the growing plant. Composting is not a complicated, precise process; but certain principles need to be followed. Compost can contain items such as **green** stuff like raw kitchen scraps and grass clippings; **brown** stuff like fallen leaves, dead plant material, and shredded paper (without colored ink). The compost “pile” must also be kept slightly moist to help it heat up and break down into its final form. Decomposers (usually tiny animals, insects, and microorganisms) help this process take place.

What if you planted “trash” in the ground? What do you think would happen?

Below is a list of items that you might use. Put a **star** beside each item that you think will become compost. **Circle** the ones that you think will *not* become compost.

1. Soda cans	2. A vegetable scrap
3. Food left-overs from your lunch	4. Coat hanger
5. Egg shells	6. A glass jar
7. Piece of Styrofoam	8. A ball of newspaper
9. Egg shells	10. A rock
11. Flip flops	12. Apple core
13. Dog bone	14. Paper cup



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Here is a fun experiment to see what will happen if you just bury something. Dig a hole, or several holes, about six inches deeper than the item that you want to bury. Note: Don't pick a very large item because it might be too hard to dig the hole. Then put the item(s) in and cover them up with the soil that you took out to make the hole. Mark each spot where an item was "planted". Now wait about a month, go back to the original holes, dig each one up, and check to see if composting is taking place. If you want to, you can cover the item(s) with the soil again and go back in a couple of weeks and see if any more composting has taken place. Be sure to keep a journal so you know what is happening, and you could also draw a picture each time.

Write a paragraph about the item you put in the hole and what happened when you dug it up. Maybe you even want to draw a picture of what it looked like when you put it in the hole and what it looks like after a month. If you want to continue this experiment, put the spoil back in the hole, wait another month and then check it again. You can then add another paragraph to your paper.

For an extended project, maybe your class can build a compost bin (you can look on the internet or call our office for further directions). You could then gather food scraps (no meat or dairy product please) from your school lunch program, leaves that fall off the trees on your school ground, newspaper to tear into shreds, and maybe even coffee grounds from the teachers' lounge. Layer all of these items in the compost bin, give it a little water every couple of days, and then watch to see what happens. When the compost is finished, scoop some out and look at it with a magnifying glass (or microscope if your classroom has one) to see what it looks like. Look for material that isn't totally composted, look for insects that have been busy helping the materials decompose, look for things you don't think you put into the compost bin. Especially look at how much compost you have and what it looks like now. Maybe you could use the compost to plant some flowers outside your school. The finished compost will help them grow larger and prettier. Don't quite now though. Finished compost needs to be applied around your plants every three months or so. So keep on composting!!

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