

A STEM in the Park

Take Home Activity

STEM

in the **PARK**™

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Compost In A Jar

What You Need

- Glass or plastic jar with lid
- Soil samples
- Water
- Leaves
- Food scraps



Background Material:

Soil is made up of mineral particles, organic matter and pore spaces which may include air, water, and organisms. Compost is not soil. It is an important component of soil in the form of organic matter, but it is not true soil. Earthworms and other organisms that live in the soil help to break down the organic material into a form that plant roots can use to get nutrients.

Continued on back

Activity Procedure:

Explain to the children that they are going to make compost, but not soil! Give each child or group of children a jar. Have them fill it half full with soil. Have each group put in five tablespoons of food scraps (banana peels, orange peels, apple peels work best DO NOT use meat, dairy products, or broccoli). Crumble 30 leaves and place on top of the food scraps. Add enough pond water or creek water to lightly moisten. (Tap water will work, but it doesn't have a lot of microorganisms). Place the lid on the jar and place it in a dark corner. Observe and shake the jar daily. Discuss what is happening in the jar and where the fruit peels are going.

Extensions or Related Activities:

Children can learn about decomposition on a larger scale by setting up a compost bin outside. Children can calculate the amount of food scraps in the jar by weighing them each day. They can graph the results and once finished, try another experiment while changing the variable, i.e. use tap water, use potting soil, leave compost jar in the sun, etc.

Tips and Helpful Hints:

Read *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Appelhof. This is a wonderful book to read to learn all about earthworms, from reproduction to raising your own.

This activity is brought to you by the Rain Garden Initiative.

