

Compost Cooking

Objectives

- Learn about composting and decomposition.
- Learn about what should and should not be placed in a compost bin.
- Improve composting skills.
- Improve reading comprehension skills.

Vocabulary

Compost
Decomposition
Organic Waste
Nutrients

Overview

Compost is nutrient rich soil that is produced from the natural breakdown of organic waste such as plants, fruits, vegetables, coffee grounds and newspaper. This process, also called decomposition, takes place when organic waste mixes with oxygen, moisture and a little sunlight. Worms, bugs, and other microbes eat organic waste helping to speed up the decomposition process. Once the organic waste fully breaks down it leaves behind a rich soil. Compost soil is homemade soil that is great for your garden!

Directions

1. Read the story *Cosmo's Compost Cooking*.
2. Answer the follow up questions
3. Complete the worksheet by creating the perfect compost recipe. Don't forget to include things that do not belong in the compost bin!

Cosmo's Compost Cooking

On a cool morning at the end of summer Trash Can Dan set out to do some yard work around the recycling center. It was almost time for school to start and that means visitors to the Education Building. "I want everything to look great!" he said out loud. "I am going to clean up the garden, mow the grass, pull the weeds, and make sure the ground is litter free." He gathered all of his tools and headed outside to start tending the garden. Over the summer Trash Can Dan's garden grew many wonderful flowers and vegetables. The flowers provided the bees and butterflies with sweet nectar and the vegetable plants became home to spiders, insects andCOSMO!?

"Hi Cosmo!" said Trash Can Dan. "What are you doing in the garden?"

"That is a silly question!" Cosmo replied. "I am a worm! I live in the garden."

"I guess you are right," Trash Can Dan chuckled. "Well what are you up to today?"

"I am going to compost of course. That is what worms do best," Cosmo smiled.

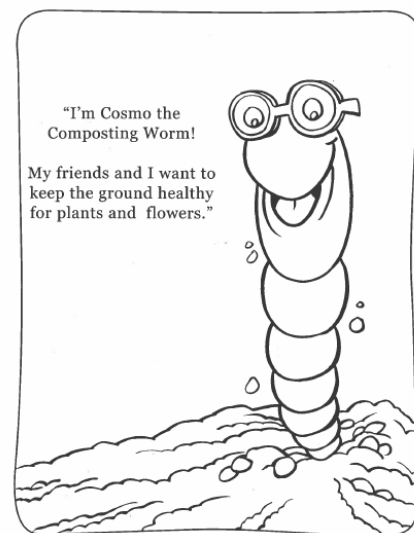
"That is great," said Trash Can Dan. "I came out to do some yard work and I always need a little help getting the compost recipe just right. Would you be able to help me?" he asked Cosmo.

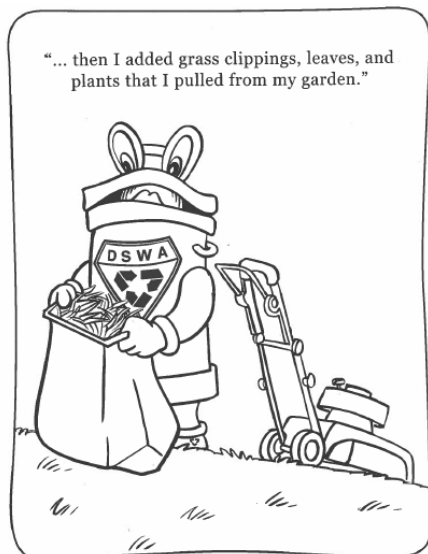
"I would love to. I am an expert in dirt!" Cosmo exclaimed. "Let us get busy with this yard work and we will meet up at lunch to see what we can compost."

"Great!" said Trash Can Dan. "I will see you at lunch."

Trash Can Dan and Cosmo began weeding, gathering sticks and cutting any plants that already bloomed. They made piles of dead flowers and raked the freshly cut grass and leaves that had already begun to fall. Finally, after a few hours of work they were ready for lunch.

"That was a lot of work," said Trash Can Dan. "But it is nice to have everything neat and clean."





“It sure is,” said Cosmo. “Did you find things to compost?”

“I tried my best,” replied Trash Can Dan.

He showed Cosmo the things he wanted to compost. “I have dead flowers, grass clippings and a broken tree branch.”

“Pretty good,” said Cosmo. “But take out the big branch. Sometimes thick branches can take a long time to decompose compared to everything else.”

“See I learned something new,” Trash Can Dan said. “What else can we add?”

“Show me what you had for lunch,” Cosmo said as he went through Trash Can Dan’s lunch. He picked out things that they could add to the compost pile like an apple core, an egg shell and even the brown paper lunch bag. “These are perfect!” Cosmo exclaimed.

“Even the lunch bag?” Trash Can Dan asked.

“Yes!” Cosmo explained. “The bag will work just fine. So would any newspaper or cardboard. In the compost world we refer to these as ‘browns’ and any grass clippings, flowers or fruits and vegetables as ‘greens’. You need a mix of both to create good compost.”

Cosmo continued through Trash Can Dan’s lunch. He took out a half of a sandwich, an empty pudding cup, and a plastic spoon.

“All of this would not go in the compost bin. Plastic, metal, other recyclables and trash cannot be added to the compost pile because worms would not be able to eat it. Other foods like meat, cheese and bread also do not belong. This type of food can attract animals like rats and raccoons to your backyard.”

“Are they friendly?” asked Trash Can Dan.

“I would not want to find out,” said Cosmo. “Especially if they are hungry!”



“There are some things that you can’t put in your compost bin, so be sure to use a recipe to get started...it’s easy!”

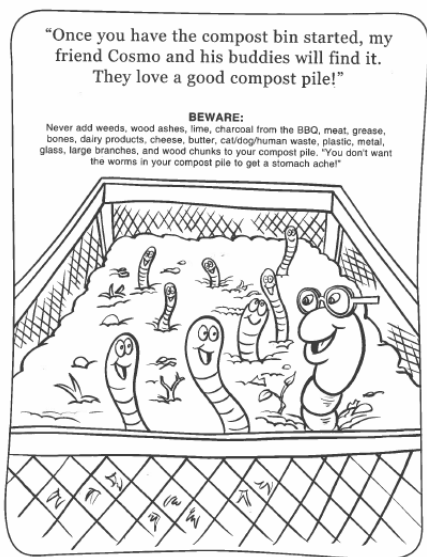
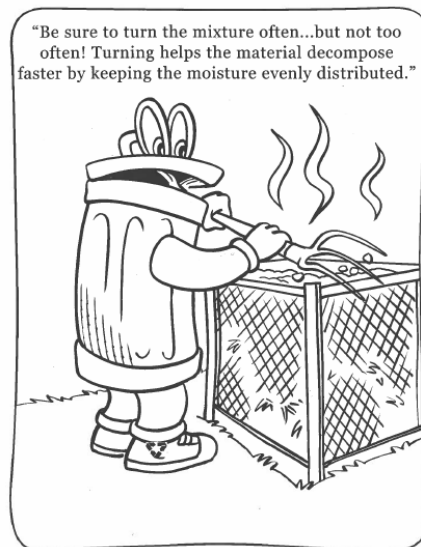
Once they had the proper ingredients Trash Can Dan and Cosmo carried everything over to the compost bin behind the recycling center. Their bin was made up of wood on the sides and fencing around it to keep out animals.

“You do not need a fancy compost bin to create great compost!” Cosmo exclaimed. “Now toss everything in!”

They made sure they had equal parts of browns and greens before they gave the pile a good stir. Trash Can Dan would have to come back every couple weeks to stir the compost to allow air to get in. They also have to make sure the pile gets a little bit of sun and some rain every once in a while.

“Now do you know one of the most important ingredients in making compost?” Cosmo asked Trash Can Dan. “I am not sure,” said Trash Can Dan. “What are we missing?”

“Me!” Cosmo replied. “Worms are very important because we eat the compost ingredients.”



“Of course! How could I forget,” said Trash Can Dan.

“Cosmo can you remind me what exactly is compost?” Trash Can Dan asked.

“Compost is soil that is created when things like plants and food break down over time with help from air, sun, water and worms! We call this decomposition. The compost recipe will create a rich soil that will help plants grow in our garden.”

“Wow! It is homemade dirt,” Trash Can Dan said surprised.

“Exactly! Now if you do not mind, I am going to dive in for an afternoon snack!” said Cosmo eagerly.

“Go right ahead,” said Trash Can Dan. “Thanks for all of your help today Cosmo!”

“Anytime,” he said diving into the fresh pile.

After a great day of working, learning, and composting, Trash Can Dan was ready to put his feet up and relax! He was so excited that all of this unwanted material will turn into soil that he can use to grow more flowers, fruits, and vegetables in the garden next year.

Follow up questions.

What is compost?

How often should Trash Can Dan stir the compost pile? Why is this important?

If you had a garden, what are 3 things you would plant?

What is your favorite chore to help with outside? What is your least favorite?

Name: _____

Here's a great
recipe for starting
your compost:

