

Edible Compost Activity

This activity was adapted and used with permission from the Gardeners of America/Men's Garden Clubs of America Organization.

In this activity, participants use edible items, such as corn flakes, dried fruits, and gummy worms to learn about composting.

Background Information for Instructor

As organic materials decompose and rot, nutrient rich compost is formed. Compost improves our soils by acting as “glue” helping to hold soil particles together, attracting beneficial soil organisms (such as worms and bacteria), and increasing nutrients in the soil needed for plant growth.

Examples of organic items that can be added to a backyard compost bin include:

- Leaves
- Sticks
- Grass clippings
- Yard waste
- Hay
- Fruit and vegetables scraps
- Newspaper

Examples of items that should not be added to a backyard compost bin include:

- Meats, meat products, bones, or fish
- Fats, greases, or oil
- Baked good (such as breads, cakes, cookies, and pies)
- Dairy products (such as milk, cheeses, and yogurt)
- Pet waste, kitty litter, or manure
- Yard waste treated with chemicals

Meats and meat products, fats, greases, oil, baked goods, and dairy products may begin to produce an odor, mold, and/or attract rodent pests as they begin to breakdown and decompose. Pet waste, kitty litter, and manure are not recommended for backyard compost bins due to pathogens they may contain.

For additional information about backyard composting the *Home Composting: A Guide to Managing Yard Waste* Extension Bulletin is available online at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ho/ho75/ho75.pdf>.

Objectives

- Understand what compost is and why it is important.
- Identify items that can be composted in a backyard compost bin.

Time

15 minutes

Materials

- Brown paper lunch bag (one per participant)
- Marker
- Corn flakes cereal
- Toasted wheat cereal (such as Chex cereal)
- Pretzel sticks
- Dried fruits (such as apples, banana chips, cranberries, raisons, etc.)
- Gummy worms
- Chocolate chips

Edible item representing compost	Compost item
Corn flakes cereal	Dried leaves
Toasted wheat cereal (such as Chex cereal)	Hay
Pretzel sticks	Sticks and twigs
Dried fruits (such as apples, banana chips, cranberries, raisin, etc.)	Fruits and vegetable scraps
Gummy worms	Worms
Chocolate chips	Compost critters

Instructions

- Prior to the activity:
 - Organize and label edible items. Label each edible item based on the compost item it represents. For example, label corn flakes cereal as “dried leaves.”
 - Whether presenting the activity in a club setting, classroom, etc. check to see if any participants have food allergies. If working with youth, talk with parents, caregivers, teachers, etc. before handing out any food items to participants.
- To begin the activity, discuss composting with participants (address questions such as what is composting, what can and cannot be composted in a backyard bin, why is composting important).
- Tell participants to strap on their imagination caps. Hand each participant a brown paper lunch bag. Tell them that the bag represents their backyard compost bin. Discuss each edible item and the compost item it represents. As you discuss each item, place some of the item in each participant’s compost bin.
- After discussing and passing out each compost item have participants fold over their brown paper bags (a.k.a. compost bin) and shake their compost. Explain to participants that compost needs air in order for items to break down and decompose. In addition to air, compost also needs moisture to break down. Tell participants that as they eat their compost they can get a drink of water to represent the moisture needed for compost to breakdown.
- Allow participants to eat their compost. As they are eating, tell participants that their “compost bin” a.k.a. brown paper bag can be composted in a backyard bin or recycled after they have finished eating their compost.

This activity was adapted and used with permission from the Gardeners of America/Men’s Garden Clubs of America Organization. For additional information about the Gardeners of America/Men’s Garden Clubs of America Organization visit <http://www.tgoa-mgca.org/> or call (515)278-0295 or email tgoasecy@qwestoffice.net.

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