

# HEALTHY DIRT HELPS THE EARTH

## *A Composting Activity For Compassionate Kids*



You know what plants need to live, don't you? Water, Sunshine, and Dirt, right? Well, that's correct, but to have the *healthiest* plants, did you know you need the *healthiest* dirt? It's true! This activity will show you how to make a really healthy dirt project called *compost*.

Composting is also a great way to cut back

on the garbage that ends up at the dump. In fact, a part of the United States government called the Environmental Protection Agency says that leftover food scraps and trimmings from our yards like cut grass and leaves make up a big part (about 25 percent) of the garbage we throw away! We can make a difference in the world by using that waste in our gardens instead!

To make compost, you will need a mixture of different types of natural garbage such as these:

**Wetter "Green" Waste (nitrogen source)** - grass clippings, coffee grounds, vegetable trimmings, banana peels, and so on.

**Dryer "Brown" Waste (carbon source)** - fallen leaves, sawdust, hay, natural wood chips, and so on.

**DON'T** use any meat or animal products or any type of animal waste products. These can create bad smells and unhealthy germs and may attract pests. Also don't use anything that's had chemicals on it like weed killer on grass clippings.

When you start the pile, add a bit of regular dirt so you'll have some of the special microorganisms in there to help break down your waste into rich, nutrient-filled soil. Worms are great for this too, especially red wiggler worms. If you have a few of those, you'll get good results even with small composting projects. (Store bought potting soil won't have the right stuff, so don't bother with that.)

Talk to your parents and decide where to put your compost bin or pile. If you have a large yard and the neighbors aren't too close, you could just make a pile at the back of your yard or make a bin out of wood posts and chicken wire. If you have close neighbors or you don't have a large yard, a closed bin may work better. Although they're a little more expensive, there are lots of good composting bins and composting tumblers available for sale on the Internet and in garden stores.

For the best results, keep your compost moist, but not soggy. Turn it over to mix it up every few days to once a week or so.

Depending on the size of your bin, what you put in it, how often you add stuff, and how often you turn it over to mix it up, getting to the finished stage could take as little as a few weeks to a month (for "hot composting") or as much as one or two years (for "cold composting," which is just like regular "decomposition" - when something rots or breaks down naturally). When your compost looks like rich, dark dirt, it's ready to add to your garden soil to make it healthy dirt for your plants.



### **SPECIAL NOTE TO ALL KIDS IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA -**

Bring a jar of your own compost mixture (in any state of completeness) to the field trip on November 22, 2004. Your compost will be added to the composting system for the Gaia Gardens Organic Farm. Now *that's* a community garden! View details for the event at this address:  
<http://www.compassionatekids.com/georgia/event-nov04.shtml>

To learn more about composting, the United States Compost Council (CompostCouncil.org) has a great publication of Frequently Asked Questions: [http://www.compostingcouncil.org/pdf/home\\_composting\\_faq.pdf](http://www.compostingcouncil.org/pdf/home_composting_faq.pdf)