



Kankakee County
Soil and Water
Conservation District



THE SCOOP ON COMPOST

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BACKGROUND: This activity is designed to teach students about compost and composting: what it is, why we should compost, how to compost, and what we should and shouldn't compost. This activity was created for elementary aged students, but can be modified for younger and older audiences.

INTRODUCTION: Go over the "Scoop on Compost" handout (modify for younger or older audiences).

MATERIALS

- "The Scoop on Compost" handouts
- Scissors
- Permanent markers
- 5 plastic bins
- Wide-mouth canning jars with lids
- Soil
- Shredded newspaper
- Brown material (dead shredded leaves work great!)
- Green material (food scraps, egg shells, coffee grounds, fresh grass clippings, etc.)
- Water and water scoop
- Optional: mortar and pestle

Set up the bins in a row, or at different stations. In separate bins, place the soil, shredded newspaper, brown material, green material, and water. If you want to make the activity more interactive, you can put a mortar and pestle and scissors at the green station, and allow the students to crush up eggshells and cut up veggies, grass clippings, etc. Everything that is to be placed in the mini composter needs to be in small pieces, so the microorganisms can break them down more quickly. See "The Scoop on Soil" handout to learn what you should and shouldn't put in your mini composter.

ACTIVITY:

Create a mini composter! Give each student a jar with a lid (punch holes in the lids to allow oxygen in). Allow students to go from station to station, layering the material in the jar. Start with a layer of soil, followed by brown material, a layer of green material, and a layer of shredded newspaper. Each layer should be about finger-width. Continue layering in that order until you fill the jar, leaving a little room at the top – like a compost lasagna! The last layer should be a layer of soil. Finally, add water to wet the concoction and cap the jar. Draw a fill line on each jar with a permanent marker. Tell the students to place their jar on a sunny windowsill. Students can watch their organic matter break down into compost. This process will take about 12 weeks. Students can use their compost in their garden or plants at home – maybe you can even do an activity in class using their compost to plant vegetables!