



Compost - What good is a rotten apple?

Fact

- A rotten apple can do a lot of good when it's used as compost in your garden.
- Compost is the name that's given to decaying or broken-down plant matter and it's a good way of recycling plants and producing less rubbish for the rubbish dumps and landfills.
- When you dig compost through your garden, you're giving your garden natural plant food so your new plants grow faster and are healthier and stronger.
- Compost also attracts worms into your garden, which dig through your soil making it better too.

Do you know

- The sorts of things you can put in your compost bin include lawn clippings, soil, straw, hay, leaves and other garden cuttings, fruit vegetable scraps, tea bags, coffee grinds, egg shells, scraps of paper, dust from the vacuum cleaner, hair, feathers, cereal, animal manure (like horse or chicken droppings)
- Things you can't put into your compost are things that won't rot down like plastic, glass, tin, big bits of wood, cooking oils, fats and meat (these can attract flies, mice or rats!) and "problem" weeds like oxalis or plants that have been sprayed with chemicals.
- Your compost heap can get hot enough to boil an egg!

Experiments you can do

Make your own compost at school or at home. It would be a good idea to get the support of your teacher or parents before you do this so they can help you (especially with the fiddly bits).

What you need:

A suitable container for your compost bin (a large plastic drum, a large wooden crate or even a large thick card board box although it will decompose too!)

A suitable place in the garden for your compost bin

Compost ingredients – see the list above

What you do:

You need to build your compost in layers. Start with tree pruning on the bottom then put a layer of "green" ingredients like grass clippings, food scraps and teabags then put a layer of "brown" ingredients like leaves, straw, hay, shredded newspaper and egg shells. Then put a layer of soil and/or animal manure. Keep building up your compost in layers as you get new ingredients.

Every few days, especially in summer you'll need to water your compost bin enough to keep the mixture moist but not soggy and you'll need to turn the compost so fresh air is mixed through and the compost that gets really hot in the middle is mixed with the cooler compost on the outer edges of the bin.

When the compost is broken down and looks like fresh soil it's ready to add to your garden as an excellent plant food.

Other Investigations

Use the heat from your compost to boil an egg. This experiment was sent in by Daniel Schipper:

What you need:

A hot summers day

A wheelbarrow or a large box full of freshly mown lawn clippings

An egg

Tin foil

What you do:

Wrap your egg in a largish piece of tinfoil so it has a tinfoil tail sticking up. Bury your wrapped egg in your freshly mown lawn clippings. If they're quite dry wet them down with water from your garden hose. Leave your egg in it's "compost nest" for a whole day. At the end of the next day carefully dig the wrapped egg out of the compost. The compost gets pretty hot remember so be very careful. As you dig it out you'll probably see steam rising from the compost and the compost will have some fungi growing in it – this helps the compost to break down.

Carefully unwrap your egg and break it open. You should find that it is almost cooked all the way through!

Throw this experiment away once you have finished with it because it's not an experiment you should eat!

(This experiment was suggested by Daniel Schipper and his Dad!)

Jokes

How do you make an apple puff?

Chase it round the garden