



Composting*

Activity M.s/H.1

GRADE LEVELS: 7 - 12

OBJECTIVE:

Upon completion of this lesson your students will be expected to:

Explain municipal solid waste (MSW) composting.

Identify compostable types of solid waste.

List the uses of compost and composting.

OVERVIEW:

This lesson deals with composting, which is classified by the EPA as a form of recycling. Composting is the controlled biodegradation of organic materials. Simply defined, organic materials are items that are produced from either plants or animals. This includes grass clippings, leaves, food waste, soiled waste paper, wood scraps, and even leather.

In this environmentally conscious decade, you might expect several students to talk about their backyard compost piles at home. This will serve as an effective opening to discuss MSW composting, and how it is similar to but also different from backyard composting.

PROCEDURE:

Distribute and discuss Student Handout 1 and 2, "Composting." Then have your students complete Student Worksheet 3.

Next distribute Student Handout 4, "Create a Classroom Compost Column," to your students and review the construction directions with them. Break them into small groups to build their own columns. You might want to vary the types of materials and the amount of sunlight and water each column receives so that your class can compare the different rates of decomposition.

Through this hands-on classroom experiment, students will be able to observe the biodegradation of organic materials in a composting column. The students can eventually use their compost in a gardening or landscaping project at school.

EXTENSIONS:

Plan a field trip to a yard waste or MSW composting facility, if one is nearby. This will enable your students to see the process working on a large scale. Provide your class with Student Handout 5 to help them in asking questions when they visit a composting facility.

*Source: Kraft General Foods Environmental Institute Solid Thinking About Solid Waste