



WINTER | Soil Compost: Think Spring!

Summary:

Gardening is all about planning ahead. Despite the cold outside, we can begin to imagine and prepare for spring, starting with our soil. Compost is a simple start to well prepared soil.

Before Visiting the Garden:

Gather: One two-liter soda bottle, scissors, soil, newspaper strips, old leaves, fruit scraps, water, masking tape, and fertilizer

Explore: “Lagoon,” 1994 by Henri Matisse. Similar to how we compost, adding different materials to create something new, Matisse used layers of paper cut-outs to make beautiful, bright pieces of art.

Read: *Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth* by Mary McKenna Siddals

In the Garden:

Composting is a great way to use the natural waste we produce to help fertilize our gardens. Peels, rinds, and tops of vegetables and fruits, in addition to washed eggshells, can decompose into delicious plant food.

Questions to Explore:

- Is there anything in the garden we could add to our home compost? Hint: decaying leaves
- Thinking back to the growing season, were there any plants you saw that could use extra nutrition?
- Where would you like to spread the compost in the spring?
- Our plants benefit from compost but how else can compost be healthy for the environment? Hint: reduces waste

Activity:

1. Rinse out the soda bottle, screw on the top tightly, and peel off the label. Have an adult help you carefully cut most of the way around the bottle $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way from the top to create a flip top on the bottle.
2. Next, put a layer of soil in the bottom of the bottle. Moisten the soil until it is just damp. Put a thin layer of fruit scraps on top of the soil, then another thin layer of soil. Carefully measure out a tablespoon of fertilizer and add that as the next layer. Continue to add more layers, alternating leaves and food scraps in the same order. The last two layers should be the fertilizer with leaves on top.
3. Tape shut the top of the bottle and place it in a sunny spot in your house. Every day, roll the bottle around to mix what’s inside, helping it to decompose. If there are drops of water on the outside of your bottle, open it up to air it out a little. If it is looking too dry inside, spray some water in it with a spray bottle.
4. Once your materials inside are crumbly and brown, your compost is ready! This process takes about a month.

Beyond the Garden | Matisse for Me!

Check out more of Matisse’s artwork and start assembling a collage of your own. Gather colorful paper, glue, and scissors. Use your compost as inspiration!

Continue Exploring | Supporting Materials

<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>

<http://www.howtocompost.org/>