

Composting

Humus is decaying plant and animal matter in the soil. It is very dark colored and gives plants the nutrients they need to grow. Humus is made naturally when plants and animals leave their waste in the soil. People can make their own humus (called compost) by simulating the process.

You may have heard of or seen compost piles like the one at the right. These help people turn their food and yard waste into compost, which is an organic fertilizer that can be used to enrich the soil. Unfortunately, compost bins can take up a lot of space.

In a small space like a classroom or an apartment, you can make compost, too! You just need a little help from some worms. Worms produce manure (called castings) that turns dirt and plant material into a rich compost.

Worms are not picky eaters, they will munch on just about anything, in quantities that would shame a sumo wrestler. That being said, there are still a few things you should know about what to feed these creatures:

- Peels and other vegetable waste: Worms will devour most any fruit or vegetable, with gusto.
- Coffee grounds and tea leaves: Take off the top bag tag first and the little metal bits.
- Egg shells: Crush with a rolling pin before adding to the bin for smoother compost later.
- Spoiled food: Go crazy, worms eat anything that's put in front of them, but stay away from dairy products. To add something that's really rotten, bury small portions deep in the bedding and cover well to discourage fruit flies.
- NOT on the menu, ever: Dog or cat feces, used kitty litter, or non-biodegradable items such as rubber bands, aluminum foil, bottle caps or glass. Nails and bones are also not to be used either.

Remember, you're in charge of the menu and the portion size. Be mindful of what your worms eat or ignore, and you'll soon know what you can put in the bin and what you should avoid.



Discussion Questions:

6. Why are worms used for a compost bin?
7. Where can you get food for your worms?
8. Where could you compost at school or at home?
9. Can you think of other animals that produce manure that can be used as compost?

Recycling Food Waste

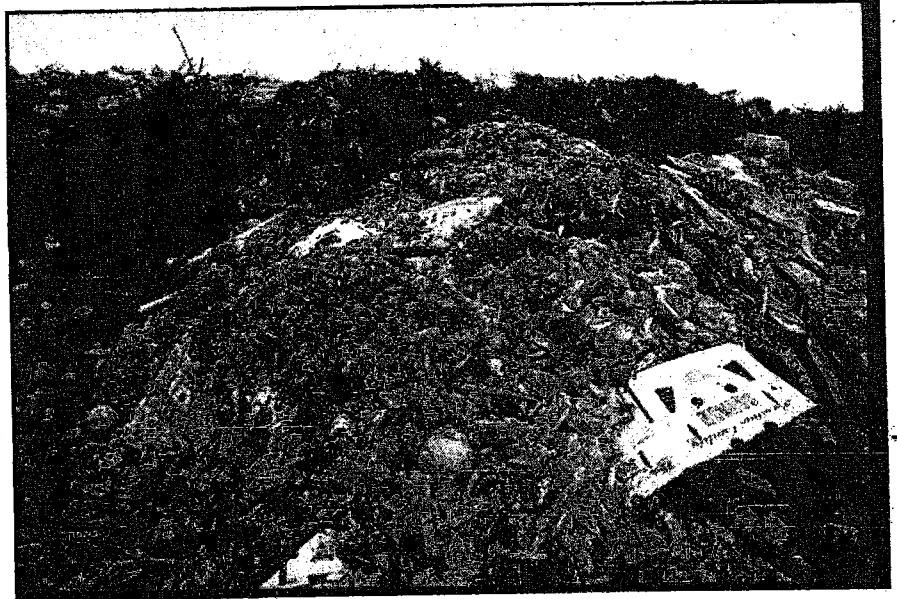
The average American creates 1.3 pounds of food waste every day. That's 475 pounds per year. When you think about all of Ohio, we are producing 5.5 billion pounds of food waste each year!

Typically, food waste is thrown into the garbage and taken to a landfill. Imagine if we could find a way to recycle all that waste. Luckily, we already have one – composting! By using composting, we can reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills and enrich our soil all in one step. What a great solution!

One of the best things about composting is that you can recycle food waste in your own home, school, or workplace. You can use it to grow flowers or vegetables many people can enjoy.

Using worms to decompose food waste offers several advantages:

- It reduces household garbage disposal costs;
- It produces less odor and attracts fewer pests than putting food wastes into a garbage container;
- It saves the water and electricity that kitchen sink garbage disposal units consume;
- It produces a free, high-quality soil amendment (compost);
- It requires little space, labor, or maintenance;
- It spawns free worms for fishing.



Discussion Questions:

10. What do you think the phrase "food waste" means?
11. What other kinds of recycling do you use?
12. How much food waste do you think Licking Heights produces each school year?
13. Would you recommend recycling food waste at Licking Heights? Why or why not?
14. Why would we want to limit the amount of waste sent to landfills?