

Spring Into Action

COMPOSTING

Fun for You and Good for the Air, Water and Land

Building a compost pile is a great family activity! It's also a fun way for you to make a difference in reducing waste, conserving water and keeping the air clean!

Even more fun is examining the ecosystem that develops within that decomposing heap. Every compost pile or heap has a life-cycle of its own.

First: you need to build a pile. The pile should be at least 3 feet by 3 feet by 3 feet for the best composting activities to take place.

To get started you need to collect organic materials. In the Compost Ecosystem the organic materials are called the Producers.

- Green material (such as grass, plants and even coffee grounds) – the source of Nitrogen that provides the raw element of proteins to build the microbes' bodies.
- Brown material (such as leaves, straw, wood chips) provides the carbon or the energy source for the microbes.

Next: you have to mix and water the materials. It should feel as wet as a wrung-out sponge.

Finally: the pile needs air. Like humans and animals, compost piles need air to keep all the organisms alive. Air promotes odor free decomposition. Try to turn your pile at least once a week and add water as necessary.

For more information on building a compost pile, call the Recycling Hotline: 625-6800 or visit www.solidwaste.org.

1st Level Consumers

Let your compost pile sit and it will start to make its own heat. It doesn't matter if the air temperature outside is warm or cold, the pile heats up as the first level consumers, called microbes, get to work. These microbes already exist within the organic materials. The right mix of compost materials allows these microbes to reproduce quickly and help decompose the pile. Some examples are:

- Bacteria: With all the right conditions (green and

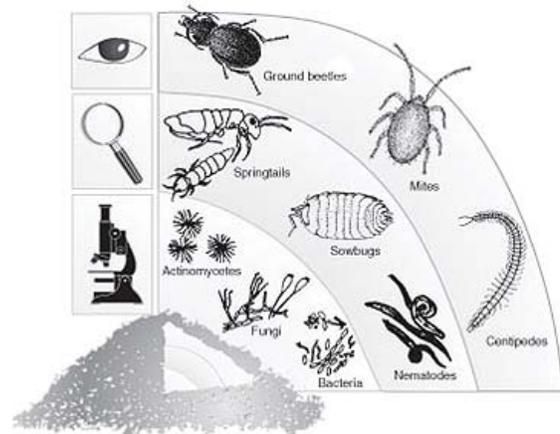
brown materials, water and air) bacteria will grow and work hard to decompose the pile. There will be different bacteria depending on the temperature of the pile: psychrophile (below 50 F), mesophile (40-110 F) and thermophile (104-200 F).

- Actinomycetes: the greyish cobweb-like growths throughout the compost pile that give a pleasing earthy smell similar to a rotting log.
- Fungi: major decomposers in the compost pile, but not as efficient as bacteria. Mushrooms are a great example.

2nd Level Consumers

After the temperatures go down in the later stages of a slowly decomposing compost pile, the pile becomes a real zoo. Larger organisms come into the pile and many feed on the earlier inhabitants. They add to the diverse cast of compost characters!

- Earthworms
- Nematodes or roundworms are the most abundant and are typically less than 1mm in length.
- Springtails
- Mites
- Centipedes
- Ground Beetles
- Pseudo Scorpions (looks like a teeny tiny Scorpion) and Ants.



What does this all mean? All these consuming critters work with the materials in our pile and turn them all into a rich, dark, nutrient-rich soil. It is sometimes called Black Gold. And it's all good for the land!

Community Calendar

April, May...hands-on activities to look, feel and learn!

Saturday, April 10, 11am-2pm: Weather Day at Mobius Kids*
*Let's Go Fly A Kite! *Normal museum admission rates apply.*

Saturday, April 10, 10am-noon: Spokane Valley's Spring Into Action Celebration at the Valley's Mission Park Picnic Shelter Area located at 11123 E. Mission.

Saturday, April 17, 11am-5pm: Earth Day Downtown on Main Street between Division and Browne. *Activities at all the booths and special ones to get you ready for the Procession of the Species. (Participate and earn points--see activity page!)*

Saturday, April 24, 11am-2pm: Spokane's Arbor Day at Finch Arboretum.
Learn more about composting and check out the active compost piles and the worm bins! Participate at each station and Spokane County residents (with ID) can take home a FREE Compost Bin (one per household).

Friday, April 30: National Arbor Day. *Plant a tree!*

Saturday, May 15: International Migratory Bird Day work party at Turnbull Natural Wildlife Refuge. *Everyone is invited. For more information call 235-4723.*



All About Points and Prizes!

Earn points by participating in EnviroKids' Club activities! Whether it's visiting the EnviroKids' booth at community events or completing the activities in one of our newsletters, you will earn points that you can redeem for a COOL prize.

20 points	—	Recycled notebook or wildflower seed packet
50 points	—	Recycled yo-yo or recycled piggy bank
100 points	—	Bird feeder or rain gauge
150 points	—	Weather radio (limited supply)
200 points	—	A live raptor presentation to your church, school or other group; or a trip on the Spokane River with the Spokane River Forum!

Look at the mailing label on this newsletter. **You will see a number next to your name. That is the number of points you have earned so far.** Want to earn more? Start today and do the activity on the next page and send it in!

Here is an example of what the mailing address looks like, and where you can find your prize points number.

Suzy Que, **25**
1010 Environmental Ave
Spokane, WA, 99201

Hey Enviro Kids ...

Some of you still have little or no points. To find out your total points, look at your mailing address label on the newsletter. Your total will be right next to your name (see example above).

There are many opportunities to participate and learn more about the environment. To keep receiving our newsletters, you need to participate in at least one activity during the year. You can return a newsletter with completed activities, send in pictures of environmental things you've done, or attend an event.

Join in the fun and start earning more points!

Composting

(continued from front page)

Finished compost, Black Gold, can be added directly to your garden beds. It helps to provide texture and air spaces in the soil so that plants will grow better. It also acts as a fertilizer by providing a slow-release of nutrients.

Compost in and/or on the soil helps to conserve or use less water in our yards and gardens. After watering, evaporation slows down so we need to water less.

Composting at home is also a clean way to "recycle" organic material. Composting your "clean green" material means one less vehicle driving to a transfer station, thus fewer car emissions.

Composting is a great option to burning materials. Burning yard materials (also called debris) is never a good idea. Inhaling smoke is not good for any of us.

In addition, the no-burn area has expanded in Spokane County so it's always good to check whether you and your family are allowed to burn.

It's good to call the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency at 477-4727 to find out more.

Arbor Day History

Arbor Day was first celebrated in 1872 in Nebraska. Journalist Julius Sterling Morton (1832-1902) created the concept to build awareness of the importance of trees, both for agriculture and the environment.

As a member of Nebraska's State Board of Agriculture, he proposed a special day dedicated to tree planting and it has now become a national day in support of planting trees!



Return this completed page to earn 10 points...or more! Check out the activities below!

Compost Activity!

Examine the Decomposing Compost...
...and earn an extra 10 points!

Activity:

1. Place a small amount of your decomposed compost on a slide and examine through a microscope. Some of the larger (2nd level consumers) can be seen with the aid of a magnifying glass.
2. Draw a picture of what you see--either below or on a paper of your choice. Send us a copy of your picture to earn 10 extra points.



Earth Day History and Activity

The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, as a grass roots movement to celebrate the environment. It was started by Senator Gaylord Nelson.

Earth Day Activity – participate in the *Procession of the Species on April 17th in Spokane!* Get a picture of yourself participating in the procession and send in to us for an **additional 10 points!**



Hi, I'm Smearthy, the earthy dude!

Did you know there is a whole world right beneath your _____? Each handful of soil has more _____ than all of the people on earth. Soil helps provide for most of our food and the materials for our _____. It also _____ habitats for animals and other organisms. Nature is also able to recycle plants! Plants breakdown or _____ and are reused in the soil as _____. You can help by _____ your own compost from yard and kitchen waste. You can use the _____ to grow new plants and trees! Just add it to your soil and you will keep the life-cycle going!

Water is also part of the equation. The earth's water-cycle depends on soil to help store and move the _____ all over the planet. Soil also filters the water which keeps it _____ for our drinking needs! So go ahead and enjoy the soil;

just look down and start digging!

Answers: feet, organisms, clothing, provides, decompose, nutrients, making, compost, water, clean



**Build A Compost Pile
or Plant A Tree in Your Backyard**
Send us a picture* and earn an **additional 25 points!**

*Send picture(s) to the club address on the back or email them to envirokids@gmail.com to receive points.



Cut along dotted line and return this page to us to earn points!



EnviroKids' Club

EnviroKids' Club
c/o National Weather Service
2601 N. Rambo Rd.
Spokane, WA 99224



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Permit No. 722

**Check out
SMEARTHY
inside!**

EnviroKids' Club....caring for the Earth

EnviroKids' Club is a way for you to team up with other kids in Spokane County--exploring all aspects of the environment: air, water, weather, garbage & recycling, plants & animals, and even you & your environment.

EnviroKids' Club members will receive an activity in the mail four times a year (in the newsletters). Complete the activity (or activities) placed on the back of this page and return the page to the Club Headquarters (address and form is below). You will earn points towards a special prize. The EnviroKids' Club is for kids grades K-6, who live in Spokane County.

Mail Completed Activities by May 14th to: EnviroKids' Club, c/o National Weather Service
2601 N. Rambo Rd., Spokane, WA 99224

Fill in this form and send back to us to earn your points! Do you also have a friend or sibling who would like to join the Envirokids' Club? Copy this page for them to send in and be added to our mailing list.

Name: _____ Age: _____ School: _____

Home Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____ Phone: _____

My child has permission to participate in EnviroKids' Club activities and to have name/picture used in ads/website.

Parent Signature and Date

EnviroKids' Club Partners:

National Weather Service, Spokane County Conservation District, Spokane County Water Resources, Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency, Spokane Regional Solid Waste System, Spokane River Forum, WA Department of Ecology and West Valley Outdoor Learning Center.

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