

## 3 SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

# Digging for Decomposers



There's an entire community of living things hidden from our view in the soil beneath us. Many of these creatures are decomposers, which break down dead plants and deposit the leftover nutrients into the soil. Let's explore underground and see what we can find!

1 hour Any Season Outdoor



## Digging for Decomposers



### LET'S GET STARTED:

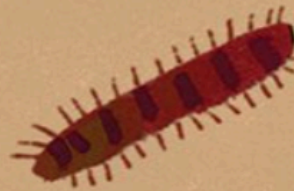
1. Collect a trowel full of soil from a place in the garden.
2. Mark the spot with a plant label, stick or any marker that's easy to find again.
3. Pour the soil onto your newspaper and spread it out.
4. Look closely for any creatures living in there, using a magnifying glass if you have one.
5. Place any creatures you see in the egg carton, each covered in a bit of soil to protect them.
6. Dig a hole about as deep as your hand and collect another trowel full of soil from the bottom.

### Tip

Decomposers include our familiar friends such as earthworms and millipedes. Did you find any in your soil?

### LET'S GATHER:

- several trowels of soil
  - some plant labels or sticks
  - newspaper
  - magnifying glass (optional)
  - empty egg carton
7. Examine this soil for creatures. Are there more living creatures down there or fewer? Are they similar or different?
  8. Keep exploring underground habitats in various parts of the garden and at different depths until your egg carton is full of creatures.
  9. Once you have finished this activity, return the creatures to the same places and soil depths where you found them. Bury them very gently in the soil. Remember, many of these creatures are decomposers in charge of making fertile soil, helping your garden grow!



EXPLORING THE GARDEN

# Who's Been Here?



Lots of animals visit our gardens when we're not looking: birds, bugs, wild mammals and even pets! Who visits when you're not looking? Let's look for clues to solve the mystery. This activity is especially fun with multiple teams of two or more.

45 minutes Any Season Outdoor

## Who's Been Here?

### LET'S GET STARTED:

1. Divide into teams of two or more people and make sure each team has a copy of the Scavenger Hunt List below.
2. Walk around the garden and look for items on the Scavenger Hunt List.
3. Every time you find something, look closely at it for clues: What animal might have left it there? What do you think they were doing? Does it look fresh or as if it's been there for a while?
4. Use the evidence to create a list of creatures you think might be visiting the garden when you're not looking.
5. If possible, go out to your garden in the evening sometimes. Try to spot nocturnal visitors!



### LET'S GATHER:

- copies of the Scavenger Hunt List for each team
- paper and pencils
- magnifying glasses (optional)

### SCAVENGER HUNT LIST:

- A plant that has been chewed. Based on the marks, what animal do you think chewed it?
- An animal footprint. Based on its size, how big do you think the animal is?
- A bird feather. What kinds of birds have feathers like this?
- A mammal hair. What kinds of animals have hair like this?
- A trail of slime. What kinds of creatures leave slime behind?  
Where was this one going?
- A tunnel. What might have dug this tunnel?
- An insect living underground. What is it?

PLANTING AND GROWING

# Root View Cups



While plants grow stems, leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds above ground, they also grow roots hidden below. Roots can be dark or light, short or long, thick or wispy. Let's make a container that allows you to see the hidden plant roots grow!

45 minutes Any Season Indoor/Outdoor

## Root View Cups

### LET'S GET STARTED:

1. Ask an adult to help you cut straight down the side of one cup. Once you reach the bottom of the cup, cut the entire bottom out.
2. Lay the remaining part of the cup flat on the piece of dark paper, where it will create an arc shape.
3. Trace this arc onto your paper. Add about 1 in (2.5 cm) to one end and cut out the arc shape.
4. Ask an adult to use the nail or drill to poke 4 holes in the bottom of the second cup, to let it drain. This will be your Root View Cup.
5. Fill your Root View Cup to the brim with compost.
6. Using the information on the seed packets, plant different seeds along the outer edges of the cup. This will allow you to see the roots as they grow.
7. Wrap your cup in the dark paper cover that you created and tape it closed. This cover keeps the light out so that your roots can grow. Give your seeds some water.
8. Every few days, pull the paper cover down and see what the plant roots look like. You can try this with different seeds to compare how their roots look and how they grow over time.
9. Water your seeds regularly and watch your plants grow, both above ground and below!

### LET'S GATHER:

- scissors
- 2 clear, plastic cups that are the same size
- piece of dark paper
- markers
- nail and hammer or drill (for an adult helper)
- bucket of finished, finely sifted compost
- seeds of 4 different plants with roots that interest you!
- tape



