

Going, Going, Gone

In this activity, children become away of decomposition and decomposers in nature.

The objective is:

- to become aware of decomposers in the ecosystem
- to find decomposers in their environment

Background:	Every year leaves fall off trees. In the woods and other park areas, no one rakes them, yet, every spring most of the leaves are gone. What happens to these leaves? Where do they go?
Skills:	Students should have some observational skills.
Age:	Grades 3 – 7 (can be extended to include younger or older children)
Activity:	<p>Ask the children what they think happens to the leaves that are left in the woods every winter.</p> <p>Take a walk through the woods or park. Look for signs of decomposition. This would be rotting leaves or twigs. Some may have mildew on them, others may have white or yellow spots. Look for mushrooms on the ground or on stumps of trees. Find bugs like ants, termites, and park beetles.</p> <p>Examine leaves or rotting logs to see what changes are taking place. Roll over logs to find evidence of decomposers.</p> <p>Allow about fifteen minutes for discovery.</p>
Discussion:	<p>The mildew, fungus and insects assist in the decomposition of leaves and trees. Mildew and bacteria help break down the leaves. Fungi (mushrooms) are the chief decomposers. All decomposers break down or cause the leaves and other organic matter to rot. This returns them to the soil and earth. Some of our best top soil is in the woods.</p> <p>Insects also break down the leaves and tree parts by eating and tunneling through them. These insects become food for other creatures in the woods.</p> <p>How many different forms of decomposition did they find? What would happen if the leaves never decomposed? How long do they think it would take a log to completely decompose?</p>

Adaptations:	Place some leaves and twigs in an old aquarium or large jar. Add some water and cover. Have the children estimate how long it will take for fungi or bacteria to form. Observe the effects of the fungi or bacteria as the leaves and twigs decompose.
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