

# Break It Down

## Try It Out

See the power of nature in action. Observe a few different pieces of trash as they slowly decay. Come back a few times over the month to check on the progress.

## What's going on?

Tiny microorganisms, such as bacteria, fungi, algae, and protozoa eat the organic waste in the container. As they break down the materials, they produce heat. Many people think of bacteria and mold as bad. But these types of organisms are beneficial to us all, because they clean up the earth's 'trash' by literally recycling organic material and turning it back into rich soil from which new living things can grow.

## What's the Big Deal?

Some items take longer to decompose or don't decompose at all. In a landfill, trash is not exposed to air, water, or sunlight, which are important to the decomposition process.

Item	Time to Decompose
Fruit or vegetable peel	2 weeks to 6 months
Paper	3 weeks to 3 months
Wool sock	1 to 5 years
Disposable diaper	450 to 500 years
Plastic bottle	450 to 1,000,000 years

(Source: Educational Insights)

## Wonder While You Walk...

The three arrows on the recycling symbol represent "reduce, reuse, and recycle." What's one way you can help with the first two?



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