

Life underground

Materials

- Large glass or plastic jar, like a peanut butter container
- Small jar or container with lid.
- Old panty hose
- 2 large rubber bands
- Black paper or cloth
- Sponge
- Garden or potting soil
- Leaves and/or grass clippings
- A few earthworms or small, red Alaska worms
- Vegetable matter for worm food

Objective

Illustrate living organisms in the soil and how they affect soil

Suggested grade levels

1-4

Alaska Content Standards

Science A 14 a-c; B 1-4; Language arts A 1-4; B3; C 1-2, 5; Mathematics A 1a; Arts A1.



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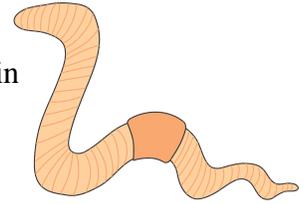
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Introduction

Worms and other small creatures that live in the soil are important because they can help keep the soil in good condition. How do they do this? Let's watch worms work.



Directions

Place the small jar inside the large jar. There should be ample room around the sides and top of the jar for the worms to crawl beneath the soil. Fill the large jar with soil. If soil is dry, moisten it slightly.

Wet the sponge and place it on top of the soil. Add the worms. Cover the top of the soil with leaves or grass clippings.

Cut a piece of pantyhose (leg portion) big enough to cover the top of the large jar and be secured with a rubber band. Tape black paper around the outside of the bottom of the jar, or wrap it in a piece of dark cloth and secure at the neck with a rubber band. Keep the jar out of direct sunlight.

Every few days replace the food (kitchen scraps like peelings work well) and make sure the sponge is damp. Add more moisture as necessary but soil should not be soggy. After about a week, the worms should have made tunnels throughout their new home.

Discussion points

- Why do we keep the soil moist for worms?

Earthworms have a high moisture content in their body and die when they get too dry.

- How do the worms' tunnels help plants?

They allow oxygen and water to move more freely through the soil, and they loosen the soil so it is easier for plants roots to move through the soil.

- How do the worms help fertilize plants?

Worms' waste products provide fertilizer.

• Are there worms in the soil at your house? *Alaska has worms only in more temperate areas. There are small, reddish annelids in the Mat-Su/Anchorage/Kenai Peninsula areas, and some earthworms in Southeast Alaska. But students are unlikely to find worms in their garden if they live in the Interior.*



Follow-up activities

Go on a worm hunt. See what sort of worms may live near your school. If there aren't any worms in the soil, are there other creatures?

Have students write a fanciful story about the relationship between a worm and the plant or plants nearby. How is this relationship like other relationships where people and/or animals and/or plants rely on each other?

Have students illustrate the story above.