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Kitchen Quest: Beginning Your Composting Journey

Family Investigation

OVERVIEW

Composting is nature's way of giving food scraps a second life as rich, nourishing soil for plants. During this quest, your family will take a look at what you toss in a single day and discover how many items can become compost instead of trash.



WHAT YOU'LL DO

To kick off your composting journey, your family will collect all the kitchen waste you throw out over one day. At the end of the day, you'll come together to look closely at what you've gathered and sort each item into groups.

As you sort, you'll explore which items belong in the trash and which can be transformed into compost by disposing of it through your green waste bin.

When you're done, you'll be ready to create a composting plan that fits your household and supports a cleaner, greener community.



WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

By participating in this activity, you'll learn how to:

- Sort food scraps and other household waste into trash, recycling and organic waste bins.
- Talk with your family and plan how to better sort household waste.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A container, bowl, or bin to collect your kitchen scraps
- A clear space on a table or countertop for reviewing your items together
- Three bags or containers to sort “compostable”, “not compostable”, and “unsure” scraps
- A way to access your local waste hauler’s sorting guidelines (website, flyer, or app)
- Paper and a pen or pencil to record what you find

Optional:

- Gloves for handling messy items



WHY THIS MATTERS

When food scraps and other organic waste end up in a landfill, they don’t break down the way they would in nature. Instead, they create methane — a gas that affects our air and contributes to climate change. But when we sort kitchen scraps into the organics bin, they decompose in a healthier way and become compost. Compost helps build strong soil, supports community gardens, and keeps neighborhoods across Orange County cleaner and greener.

California’s [**Senate Bill 1383 \(SB 1383\)**](#) sets statewide targets to reduce methane and other greenhouse gases. It requires cities, and waste haulers to divert food scraps, yard waste, and other organic materials and keep them out of landfills. And you can help! Everything collected in your green organics bin is sent to a special facility at Orange County’s landfills, where it’s sorted and transformed into nutrient-rich compost.

By practicing sorting your kitchen scraps over the course of one day, you’ll build the knowledge you need to divert more of your organic waste into the green organics bin.



ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS: KITCHEN QUEST

Step 1: Set Up Your Collection Container

To start, choose a container to hold all of your daily waste. If you are worried about smells, use a closed container or save a spot in your fridge to keep the items in your collection bag from rotting sooner.

Make sure everyone in the family knows where the collection container is so that they can help with saving their scraps!





Step 2: Save Your Scraps

Now comes the fun part: save your kitchen waste for the day! Any time someone cooks, snacks, or prepares a meal, set aside any remains. This might include things like fruit peels, coffee grounds, tea bags, plastic wrappers, leftover food, or eggshells.

If you'd like an extra challenge, look for other trash that your family generates throughout the day. This could include plant trimmings from caring for house plants or a home garden, napkins, or even today's newspaper.



Step 3: Sort the Collection Bag

When all the day's food has been collected, take out the collection container and prepare to sort the kitchen waste into three bags: **Compostable**, **Not Compostable**, and **Unsure**.

Your family can work together to pull items out from the collection bag and sort them into the right bag. Try to take notes as you go! If you would like, you can use gloves during this activity to keep your hands clean.



Step 4: Check Your Sorting

It's time to see how you did! If you haven't already, check out oceansfills.com/organics to locate your local hauler and their guide for sorting waste.

Use the guide to see if you sorted all your waste correctly. If there are any items left in your **Unsure** bag, check the guide to see where they should go.

The **Not Compostable** bag may contain items that might belong in your recycling bin. Rinse and dry any bottles, cans, or other items so that you can recycle them.

Finally, take a moment and celebrate all the items that you added to your **Compostable** bag! These are items that you saved from going into the landfill. You can now add your compostable waste bag with its contents into your green waste bin.



TAKE IT FURTHER

You've now seen what it's like to compost for a day! Can you help reduce your family's waste over an entire week? Put what you've learned into practice and try your hand at the **Household Green Waste Sorting Challenge**!

