

Experiment

Earthworms are decomposers. They feed on dead plant material and break it down to nutrients that can be used by other plants to grow. They are commonly found in soil.

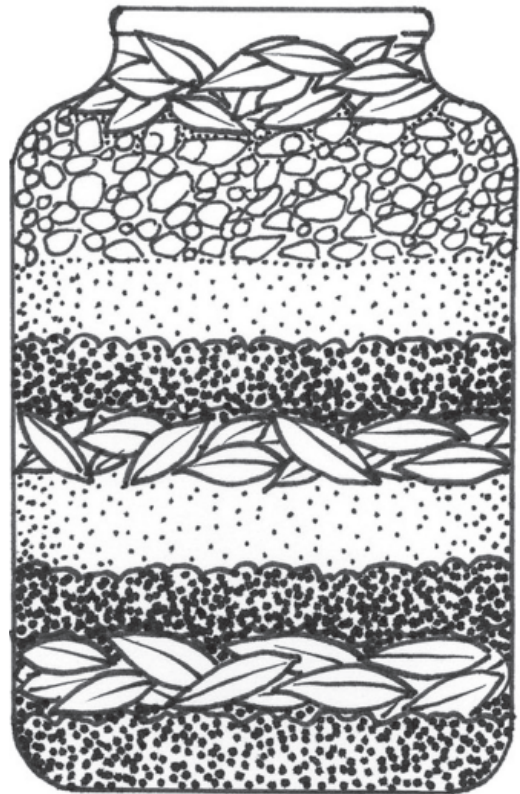
You can see how they break down leaves and make tunnels in soil by looking at a wormery.

How to make a wormery

You will need:

1. a large glass/plastic jar such as one for holding sweets;
2. layers of leaves, soil, sand and chalk.

If you put earthworms into the jar and cover the jar with a black plastic bag, the worms will work away in the darkness mixing up the layers and eating the leaves. Keep the soil slightly damp and open the black bags for just a few minutes every two days to see what is going on. If you leave the bag off, you won't see anything as worms keep away from the light.



How to capture worms to put in the jar

You have to convince the earthworms to come up to the surface of the soil.

Work in groups of 4. You will need a 5 litre bottle of water (or 2 smaller bottles) and an empty box to put the worms in.

Go outside and pick an area of grassland 1 metre square.

Water it with all the water. Then start stamping – carefully – on the ground you have watered. The worms down below will think that it is raining and will start coming up to the surface. This may take 5 minutes or so but keep at it.

Bring the worms back to the wormery and put them in.