

FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN

Soil Scavenger Hunt

Goal:

To let children explore soil and compost, observing their components and qualities first-hand.

Time:

Allow 1 hour

Materials:

Gloves

Plastic containers (1-quart size is good)

Shovels or other digging utensils (large spoons work well)

Soil or compost from the garden area

Magnifying glasses

Paper

Crayons and pencils

Soil Observation handout and clipboard (optional)

Activities:

1. Begin with a discussion of the following topics:

- What is a garden?
- What do plants need to grow?
- Why do plants need soil?

Explain that today they are going to look at soil. Although soil may look like it is just made up of dirt, it is actually a complex mixture of rock particles, organic matter and microorganisms. As soil organisms feed on organic matter in the soil, it becomes more broken down, or decomposed. Another word for decomposed organic matter is compost. As students dig through garden soil or compost, they may find rocks, small insects and worms, dead plant matter, and roots. Ask the students what else they might expect to find.

2. Give each child a collecting container and point out places where they can dig in the garden. Ask them to collect things that they find in the soil.
3. You may give each student a Soil Observation handout with a clipboard and ask them to fill out the worksheet as they explore the soil (optional depending on grade level).
4. When children have had a chance to dig for 10 or 15 minutes, bring the group back together. Go around the circle and ask children to share their findings.

Ask:

- What is it?
 - Where did it come from?
 - Does it help plants? How?
 - Does it help make soil? How?
 - Is it living or non-living? If dead, did it used to be living?
5. If time permits, you may do an extension of this activity by asking the students to either write about or draw some of the things that they discovered in the soil and compost. This is something that can be included and kept in a garden journal or notebook.
 6. If students completed the Soil Observation handout, compare answers and observations. Discuss why some students may have observed differences.

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SOIL OBSERVATIONS

Use the questions below to describe the soil.

Is the soil moist or dry?	Feel the texture of the soil – does it feel like clay or sand?
What color is the soil?	Does the soil have rocks in it? If so, are they small, medium or large? Are there a few rocks or many?
Does the soil have bugs or other living things in it?	Does the soil have leaves or other organic matter in it? How much?

Something else I observed about this soil is:
