BE A SOIL SCIENTIST

Microbe meal

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1. Dig a 10-cm (4-in) pit and put the sock on some paper.
2. Use a trowel to fill the sock with some of the soil.
3. Put the sock in the pit and cover it with the rest of the soil from the paper.
4. Tape card to a stick to make a marker. Mark the spot.
5. Dig the sock up after eight weeks. If it’s been eaten, with plenty of holes, the soil is healthy because it has lots of organisms!

Worm hotel

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1. Ask an adult to help you cut the bottle in half, being careful with the scissors. Add a 10-cm (4-in) layer of soil. Spray it with water.
2. Spraying water after each layer, add 0.5 cm (0.2 in) of sand, 0.5 cm (0.2 in) of compost, and 5 cm (2 in) of soil. Poke 1-cm (0.5-in) holes in the hotel with a pencil.
3. Dig in your garden or a park to find five worms. Put them in the hotel. They’ll burrow down, dig the holes. Add leaves as food.
4. Worms like the dark! Wrap cardboard around the wormery to block out light. Spray the hotel with water daily.
5. After a week, see how the worms have changed the soil. There will be lots of burrows, the layers will have begun to disappear, and the leaves may have been dropped into the soil.
6. Release the worms back into their original home after your week’s experiment.

Hints and tips

• Don’t use worms from a compost heap. These don’t live in soil.
• Look after the worms by keeping them in dark, cool, and damp conditions. Carry them to a shop-bought carrot.
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Perfectly Wonky carrots

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1. Carrot seeds should be sown from April until July. Rake the soil to loosen it, and dig a 1-cm (0.5-in) deep row.
2. Sprinkle the carrot seeds along the row, about 10 for every 3.5 cm (1 inch) of length. Cover with soil.
3. If there’s no rain in the first few days, water the row and cover it with damp newspaper for a week or so.
4. Water the carrots often but gently, at ground level.
5. When the plants are around 10 cm (4 in) tall, thin them to one plant every 6 cm (2 in) by pulling out the smaller ones.
6. After 16-20 weeks your carrots should be fully grown. Gently pull them out of the ground.
7. Compare the carrots to a shop-bought one to see the difference!