

Name _____
Date _____

Compost

What do you do with your orange peels and corn cobs after you are done eating? Most people throw them in the trash can. But most food leftovers do not have to go into the trash. They are biodegradable, which means that they can be broken down by bacteria into natural materials. People who like to garden often put their fruit and vegetable scraps in a special place known as a compost pile.



A compost pile is a spot outdoors where food waste can break down into compost, which gardeners use. This process takes several months. Once the compost is created, people spread this mixture in their gardens to add nutrients to the soil. The compost in the soil helps new plants grow in the garden.

How do you take care of a compost pile? It needs air, water, and heat. Bacteria and other microorganisms break down the food waste into more basic elements like water and carbon dioxide. This process requires oxygen, so people use a shovel to turn compost regularly and help air reach all parts of the pile. The pile cannot dry out, so it should be covered to keep moisture in. Finally, heat speeds up the process. This means a compost pile should be in the sun for at least part of the day.

Food leftovers are not the only things that turn into compost. You can also add yard waste like grass clippings, dried leaves, and straw. In fact, you should add these things to create a healthy balance in your compost. But do not add any weeds to your compost pile unless you want to grow weeds in your garden! Sometimes seeds are left behind in the compost. This can be a welcome surprise if you find a tomato plant sprouting where you had not planted one. The tomato seed was hiding in the compost, waiting to begin a new life in the garden.

- 1) According to the passage, gardeners use compost to
 - A. reduce the amount of trash on the planet
 - B. break down food waste
 - C. add nutrients to the soil
 - D. take care of bacteria and other microorganisms

- 2) The author explains that to take care of a compost pile you have to
 - I. turn it regularly
 - II. cover it
 - III. make sure it is in the sun for at least part of the day
 - A. I only
 - B. I and II only
 - C. II and III only
 - D. I, II, and III

Answers and Explanations

1) C

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

To answer this detail question correctly, we need to find where the author discusses how gardeners use compost in the passage. A good way to do this is to scan the topic sentence of each paragraph, since this sentence will likely tell us what information can be found in the rest of that paragraph. The topic sentence of paragraph 2 reads: "A compost pile is a spot outdoors where food waste can break down into compost, which gardeners use." This lets us know that the details we are looking for can likely be found in paragraph 2.

In paragraph 2, the author tells us, "Once the compost is created, people spread this mixture in their gardens to add nutrients to the soil." This means that gardeners use compost to add nutrients to the soil. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Although putting food waste into a compost pile instead of the trash could reduce the amount of trash on the planet, the author does not tell us that this is why gardeners use it. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

The author tells us that a compost pile is used to break down food waste, but the compost itself is what is created in the compost pile. The compost is not used to break down food waste. Instead, it is the product of this process, and it is used in gardens. This makes **(B)** incorrect.

While bacteria and other microorganisms help break the food waste down into compost, gardeners do not use the compost to take care of bacteria and other microorganisms. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

2) D

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

To answer this detail question correctly, we need to find where the author discusses how to take care of a compost pile in the passage. A good way to do this is to scan the topic sentence of each paragraph, since this sentence will likely tell us what information can be found in the rest of that paragraph. The topic sentence of paragraph 3 reads: "How do you take care of a compost pile?" This lets us know that the details we are looking for can likely be found in paragraph 3.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "This process requires oxygen, so people use a shovel to turn compost regularly and help air reach all parts of the pile." This means that to take care of a compost pile, you have to turn it regularly. This supports **option (I)**.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "The pile cannot dry out, so it should be covered to keep moisture in." This means that to take care of a compost pile, you have to cover it. This supports **option (II)**.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "Finally, heat speeds up the process. This means a compost pile should be in the sun for at least part of the day." This means that to take care of a compost pile, you have to make sure it is in the sun for at least part of the day. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

3) D

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In the final paragraph, the author warns, “But do not add any weeds to your compost pile unless you want to grow weeds in your garden! Sometimes seeds are left behind in the compost.” This means that the seeds of weeds can be left behind in the compost and turn into new weeds in the garden.

Next, the author gives an example of what can happen to leftover seeds: “This can be a welcome surprise if you find a tomato plant sprouting where you had not planted one. The tomato seed was hiding in the compost, waiting to begin a new life in the garden.” From this we can understand that a tomato seed that hides and turns into a tomato plant is a “welcome surprise,” but that a seed that hides and turns into a weed in the garden would be an unpleasant surprise. This means you should not put weeds in a compost pile because the seeds can create new weeds in your garden.

Therefore **(D)** is correct.

In the final paragraph, the author advises adding “yard waste like grass clippings, dried leaves, and straw” to a compost pile “to create a healthy balance in your compost.” But he or she does not suggest that the reason you should not add weeds is because it does not create a healthy balance. Instead, the author suggests that the problem with weeds is that leftover seeds can turn into new weeds. This makes **(A)** incorrect.

In the final paragraph, the author tells us that “food leftovers are not the only things that turn into compost,” so **(B)** is incorrect.

The author says that a tomato seed that turns into a plant is a “welcome surprise,” so we can understand that sometimes you might want surprise plants growing in your garden. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

4) B

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

sprout (*verb*): to begin to grow; to give off shoots or buds.

In the final paragraph, the author writes that sometimes seeds hide in a compost pile and turn into new plants. He or she says, “This can be a welcome surprise if you find a tomato plant sprouting where you had not planted one.” From this we can understand that a tomato plant is growing from a seed that was hidden in the compost instead of planted on purpose. This tells us that sprouting means growing. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

We know that a tomato plant is beginning to grow, but the author does not suggest that it is blooming or that it has flowers. This means that **(A)** is not the best choice.

Although the tomato plant is appearing in the garden, this word is not as specific as growing. The tomato plant does not just show up in the garden, it grows there. This eliminates **(C)**. The author says that the tomato seed was hiding in the compost, but this does not mean that the tomato plant is hiding in the garden. This makes **(D)** incorrect.