



Section 6

Embedding care for our outdoor spaces into our experiences

“Small creatures were valued because they provided direct experiences of animal life cycles and were a means of learning about ecosystems and natural phenomena like the weather, seasons, life and death.”

(Lerstrup et al. (2021, p67))



Find out more

- Care Inspectorate (2018) **Animal Magic**
- **Out to Play** Section 6.4
- **NatureScot** - resources suitable for early years and advice on wildlife crime and protected species
- **Outdoor and Woodland Learning Scotland** website has lots of relevant resources
- **Silverhaar** has wee songs and stories about animals
- **Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**
- **Police Scotland Wildlife Crime**

6.11 Food and composting

Why this matters

Composting enables children to see how decomposers such as worms, slugs, other invertebrates, fungi and microbes play a part in breaking fruit, vegetables and other items into organic matter. Compost conditions the soil providing nutrients for plants. The compost bin becomes a home for many decomposers. This helps improve the biodiversity in our outdoor space. It saves money and energy too. Have a look at **6.2**

Why soil matters

Building on prior learning

- Finding a worm outside and wondering where a good place would be to put it.
- Start small - make compost in a bottle or in a bag!
- Creating sequencing books using photos of your children doing each stage of the composting cycle makes it personal and relevant to the children involved.
- Many tiny creatures live in a compost bin. During the warmer months, put a bit of the compost under a powerful magnifier or microscope to see what is happening at a micro level.



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Reflective thoughts

- Are we aware of our families' perspectives on food and can we ensure our practice is sensitive to their needs? For example, in some cultures, food provision is not acceptable.
- In what ways could you ensure your food provision is litter-free to avoid packaging ending up in landfill?
- The process of composting ensures that food is never wasted. What isn't suitable for us to eat can be recycled. How does thinking about food like this impact upon the conversations you have with a child about trying different foods?

Embed composting into your snack and meal routines

- 🗨 Which parts of the vegetable are we going to eat and which parts will the compost creatures like?
- 🗨 Aha! I see there's some food left for the worms and slugs to eat.
- 🗨 We've had our snack, now the compost creatures need theirs - who would like to feed them today?
- 🗨 Remember to wash food caddies after emptying.

Grow and harvest fruit and vegetables with children so they witness the cycle of decomposition and plant growth. Here is a video to explain how [Earthtime Elgin](#) have approached growing their own food.

Wormeries work well

"There's a mix between children who get REALLY engaged and want to be involved in feeding the worms every week and others who are not interested. Even these children usually show an interest when it's time to get the compost out and use it in the garden. They like the way it's turned from food we don't want into something useful. The wormery pretty much looks after itself. A couple of times a year, I rearrange the levels and take out the compost to make space for more food scraps. Once a year we collect the 'worm pee' from the base of the wormery which can be used as a natural fertiliser once diluted. We sell it to parents at sports day. Some families put in an order every year so it works! Don't worry if you are squeamish, you don't actually see the worms that much and they don't smell any more than any other enclosed compost bin."

(Nyssa Pinkerton, Blackhall Nursery, Edinburgh.)

Remember

- The practicalities of a compost bin: ease of access, size, height and location: sited on soil and in the shade. Source free ones or at a discount price from local authorities. Simple designs can be built from wooden planks or pallets. Front-opening compost bins show the layers of transformation taking place.



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- There's different approaches to composting, which could engage children. Examples include food waste digesters, green cones, a wormery and making leaf mould.
- Put compost bins beside minibeast homes so the creatures can migrate between them.
- Most compost bins need emptying and the organic matter added to your garden on an annual basis.
- If your compost bin is very smelly then something is wrong. Seek advice.
- Some staff and child may find the concept of composting off-putting. What support do they need to acclimatise?

Being aware

- Avoid food play outside, e.g., the use of rice, pasta, lentils. It can attract scavenging animals to the site or increase numbers of certain species, potentially leading to adverse changes in biodiversity and the spreading of diseases. Use mud or nylon-free clay as alternatives to playdough.
- Take all litter, including any spare food back to your base. Recycle the packaging and compost the leftover food. For an example of how this works in a setting, here is a [video](#) from Earthtime Elgin.
- After Halloween, compost your pumpkin. Don't leave outside for wildlife. It's particularly bad for hedgehogs.

“HSCS 1.38 If appropriate, I can choose to make my own meals, snacks and drinks, with support if I need it, and can choose to grow, cook and eat my own food where possible.”



Find out more

For practical ideas, advice and material that can be safely composted

- The Little Rotters [Composting Handbook](#)
- [The Recycled Devon School](#)
- Section 6.12 Compost cycle on the next page
- Care Inspectorate (2018) [Food Matters guidance](#) for best practice around food
- The Royal Highland Education Trust has developed an online [learning resource](#) exploring food and sustainability which aims to engage learners in real world issues through providing information and activities.



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6.12 Compost Cycle

