

How Long Does it Take to Decompose?

Use your critical thinking skills while you take this quiz

Decomposition is the organic process of rotting, where plant and animal matter is broken down and decays as a result of bacterial and fungal activity.

First, consider how our world would look different if nothing decomposed. What makes things decompose? What factors *speed up* decomposition?

Next, see if you can estimate how long different things take to decompose when buried underground in the soil. Think about what material an item is made out of, size, thickness, and whether it is natural or manmade:



ITEM	MY GUESS (# of days, weeks, months, or years to decompose)
1. Banana Peel	
2. Paper Bag	
3. Cardboard	
4. Wool sock	
5. Aluminum can	
6. Disposable diaper	
7. Plastic bag	
8. Glass bottle	
9. Styrofoam	

Answer key: 1.) 2 weeks, 2.) 3-4 weeks, 3.) 2 months, 4.) 20 years, 5.) 500 years, 6.) 550 years, 7.) 20-1,000 years, 8.) 1-2 million years, 9.) 1-2 million years.

Reflect: What patterns do you notice? Are there items on the chart that would do better in a *recycling bin*, where they would then get recycled rather than sit underground in a landfill? Which items would be better in a *compost bin* where they can decompose, instead of being buried in a landfill?