

Explore Earth Science and Make a "Worm Hotel"

Some kids may squirm when they see an earthworm, but for most kindergarteners, these slinky critters are rather fascinating. And for budding scientists, earthworms also an important part of the study of earth science and conservation. Healthy soil should contain lots and lots of worms—they break down raw materials like dead leaves, ventilate the soil as they move through it, and build it up with their casings.

There's only one problem for avid kindergarten scientists: worms do all this underground, in the dark!

Want to help your child explore what's really going on? Try making this simple "worm hotel" to see what a few worms can do with a little moist soil.

What You Need:

- Large glass jar, such as an empty mayonnaise jar
- Sand
- Potting Soil
- Dark colored construction paper
- Tape
- Sparkly gel markers or glitter glue that can be used on dark paper
- 3-4 big, healthy earthworms
- Water

What You Do:

1. Have your kindergartener start by pouring about 1" of sand onto the bottom of the jar. Alternate between layers of sand and soil—4 or 5 layers in all—until the layers reach the top of the jar.
2. Dampen the whole mixture with some water, and then put the earthworms onto the top. They will begin to burrow their way into the soil almost immediately.
3. Earthworms don't like bright sun, so now you need to give them a little privacy. Cut the dark construction paper to size so that it will fit around the jar, and invite your child to take a few minutes to decorate it and perhaps write a title on it. Then tape the paper around the edge of the jar, taking care to leave the jar top off so that the worms get air.
4. After 3-4 days, pull the paper off. You'll see that the worms have been very busy: even though you didn't move the jar, the worms have traveled all around and mixed all the layers together!
5. You can continue to watch the worms explore for a few days, but after that, be sure to return them to their natural habitat. Those little worms are a major part of our ecosystem, constantly digesting and composting and enriching the nutrients in the soil, and hopefully with this activity, even the squirmiest of kids will appreciate the work that they do.

