



Decomposition in the Forest

A warm wind blows gently through the trees. A leaf falls from a tree to the forest floor. Bacteria from the soil move onto the leaf. They begin to feed on the leaf, breaking it down. As the bacteria get energy and nutrients from the leaf, they reproduce and grow. More bacteria begin to feed on the fallen leaf.

The leaf begins to show signs of decomposing. An earthworm breaking through the top of the soil swallows a piece of the leaf. The earthworm also swallows some soil along with bacteria and fungus living in the soil. The worm's insides grind up the leaf matter. The bacteria living in the worm's intestines help the worm digest the leaf matter. The worm gives off waste called "castings." The castings become part of the soil on the forest floor. Other bacteria and fungi begin to feed on the worm's castings.

They decompose the castings and release the nutrients in them into the soil and air. The tree takes up some of these nutrients in its roots. Plants and animals in the forest breathe in nutrients in the air. The wind blows

nutrients to other ecosystems.

A centipede crawling over the fallen leaves sees the earthworm. It catches and eats the worm. Just as the centipede finishes its meal, a blackbird spies it from a tree branch above. The blackbird flies down and snatches the centipede in its beak. Then it flies back up to the branch to enjoy its meal in the warm wind blowing through the trees.



Leaves on a forest floor