

SHORT FILM WORKSHEET



The Rotten Truth About Forest Decomposition

Rotten Standing Tree

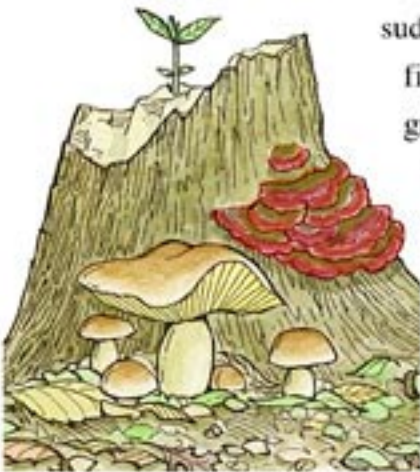
Sometimes a fungus will attack just the inside or heartwood of a dead tree. This will make the tree rot from the inside out. That can be good for forest animals as it provides tree cavities for birds and small mammals to raise young. Once a tree falls to the forest floor it can become a protective home to snakes, salamanders, insects, worms, centipedes, rodents and shrews.



Rotten Logs and Stumps

Rotting trees and vegetation on the forest floor hold water like a sponge and will keep the forest from drying out in a long dry spell of no rain (drought), that might kill plants and trees and lead to forest fires. In the same way, they also keep too much rain from causing damage to the forest from run off, erosion (washing away the topsoil), and flooding.

As standing trees rot, they also become an important place for lichens and mosses to grow. When they finally fall, they can open up a sunny spot in the forest. This allows sun to finally reach the forest floor that has been in shade for many years. Seeds that lied dormant in the shade suddenly sprout and grow. Seedlings compete and grow quickly to fill the gap and take their place in the forest canopy – the fastest growing trees winning out. This is part of forest succession an how a forest ages and changes over time. In this way decomposition plays a role in the life cycle of the whole forest.



The Red Belt Fungus

One of the most impressive looking tree fungi is called red belt fungus. This fungus is called a conk, a hoof-shaped fungus with a brown top with a red band near the edge. Underneath it is white. Red belt fungus causes logs to break

down by “cubical rot.” If you have walked much in the forest you have probably seen this. It is when, as the tree rots, the inside becomes broken up into cube-shaped pieces. Sometimes you can spot the delicate white mycelium in some of the cracks. Many fungi can cause cubical rot, their tiny mycelium breaking down the rotting wood into cubes. Look for it on your next hike.



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— Read and React —

After reading about forest decomposition answer the following questions.

1. How do dead, rotting trees benefit forest animals? _____

2. What animals use a standing dead tree? _____

3. What animals use a dead tree that has fallen and is rotting on the ground? _____

4. How do dead, rotting trees benefit the forest in wet and dry conditions? _____

5. How do dead, rotting trees benefit the forest soil? _____

6. How do dead, rotting trees benefit forest trees and plants? _____

