

Top of the Heap

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Common name

Latin name

Food chain level: **Who eats who? Level 1 is a top predator and level 7 is a decomposer.**

No. of legs: **No legs, 4 legs, 6 legs, 8 legs or more?**

Length: **How big is your compost creature?**

Life span: **How long does your creature live?**



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Garden Organic is the national charity for organic growing. The Master Composter programme is a network of enthusiastic volunteers across the UK, who promote home composting in their local communities. To find out more about Garden Organic contact us:

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How to play

'Top of the Heap'

2-4 players or groups. Deal out all the cards face down. The first player chooses a category from their top card (e.g. legs, length, life span) the next player reads out their value of the same category. The person with the highest value wins and collects the other players' top cards. The person with all the cards at the end wins!

Other ideas: creature ID bingo, create a food web, snap (with two packs), or your own idea!



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Woodlouse

Oniscus asellus

Food chain level: **6**

No. of legs: **14**

Length: **1.4cm**

Life span: **Up to 4 years**

Info: *Also called sow bugs or pill bugs, they break down cellulose in woody material. They curl up when threatened.*



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Common Centipede

Lithobius fortificatus

Food chain level: **4**

No. of legs: **30**

Length: **2-3cm**

Life span: **Has been known to live for 11 years**

Info: *They have a single pair of legs for each body segment and are fast moving predators.*



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Brandling / Tiger Worm

Eisenia fetida

Food chain level: **7**

No. of legs: **0**

Length: **5cm**

Life span: **3-5 years**

Info: *Vital decomposers in the compost heap these stripy red worms produce highly fertile worm casts.*



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Springtails

class Collembolans

Food chain level: **6**

No. of legs: **6**

Length: **1.4cm**

Life span: **Up to 4 years**

Info: *Commonly found in compost, these detritivores can jump around with their spring loaded 'furcula'.*



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Hedgehog

Erinaceus europaeus

Food chain level: **2**

No. of legs: **4**

Length: **25cm**

Life span: **2-3 years**

Info: *Hedgehogs are in decline in the UK, a compost heap will provide a valuable source of insects to eat.*



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Nematodes

Phylum Nematoda

Food chain level: **6**

No. of legs: **0**

Length: **less than 2.5mm**

Life span: **Up to 2 months**

Info: *Small but important, these worm-like creatures can feed on bacteria, fungi, plants or other creatures.*



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Pseudoscorpion

Pseudoscorpionida

Food chain level: **5**

No. of legs: **8**

Length: **2.5-8 mm**

Life span: **1-3 years**

Info: False scorpions are predators in the heap, using poison sacs in their pincers. Often hitch a ride on flies.



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Black Garden Ant (worker)

Lasius niger

Food chain level: **5**

No. of legs: **6**

Length: **2-5mm**

Life span: **1-3 years**

Info: Ants feed on seeds, fungi and other insects. They help create air pockets and benefit the compost.



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Mite

Subclass of Acari

Food chain level: **8**

No. of legs: **8**

Length: **0.08-16 mm**

Life span: **Days to months**

Info: *These arachnids are numerous in the heap, some are predators, and some are decomposers.*



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Leopard Slug

Limax maximus

Food chain level: **5**

No. of legs: **0**

Length: **10-20cm**

Life span: **2-3 years**

Info: *Feeding on dead plants, fungi and other slugs they are often called the 'Gardeners' Friend'.*



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Common Millipede

Tachypodoiulus niger

Food chain level: **7**

No. of legs: **Around 100**

Length: **Up to 6cm**

Life span: **Up to 9 years**

Info: *Slow moving, with two pairs of legs per segment. They feed mainly on decaying plant material.*



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Violet Ground Beetle

Carabus violaceus

Food chain level: **3**

No. of legs: **6**

Length: **3cm**

Life span: **2-3 years**

Info: *Beetles and their larvae are invaluable! In the heap they feed on slugs, snails and other pests.*



Photograph © Ray Spence

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European Earwig

Forficula auricularia.

Food chain level: **4**

No. of legs: **6**

Length: **1-2cm**

Life span: **1 year**

Info: *Mostly feeding on decaying matter they use their back pincers for defence.*



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Common Fruit Fly

Drosophila melanogaster

Food chain level: **7**

No. of legs: **6**

Length: **2cm**

Life span: **One month**

Info: *Often seen in compost heaps and hovering around fruit, even indoors. They are slow fliers.*



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Actinobacteria (phylum)

Genus: Streptomyces has over 500 species

Food chain level: **8**

No. of legs: **0**

Length: branching structure
0.5-2.0 μ m in diameter.

Life span: **Days to months**

Info: *Forms greyish cobweb like growths on the compost. Pleasant earthy smell.*



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Wood Mouse

Apodemus sylvaticus

Food chain level: **2**

No. of legs: **4**

Length: **11cm body, 11cm tail**

Life span: **Up to 1 year.**

Info: *Small, commonly found rodents, they will often shelter in the compost heap.*



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Common Toad

Bufo bufo

Food chain level: **2**

No. of legs: **4**

Length: **Up to 15cm**

Life span: **10-12 years**

Info: *Toads often hibernate in the compost heap, and also eat pests such as slugs and snails.*



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Grass Snake

Natrix natrix

Food chain level: **1**

No. of legs: **0**

Length: **Over 1m**

Life span: **Up to 25 years**

Info: *Warm compost heaps provide ideal conditions for grass snakes. Slow worms also enjoy the heap!*