Cometabolism Encyclopedia Article

Cometabolism

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Cometabolism

The partial breakdown of a (usually) synthetic compound by microbiological action. Synthetic **chemicals** are widely used in industry, agriculture, and in the home; many resist complete enzymatic degradation and become persistent environmental pollutants. In cometabolism, the exotic molecule is only partly modified by **decomposers** (bacteria or **fungi**), since they are unable to utilize it either as a source of energy, as a source of **nutrient** elements, or because it is toxic. Cometabolism probably accounts for long-term changes in DDT, dieldrin, and related chlorinated hydrocarbon insecticides in the **soil**. The products of this partial transformation, like the original exotic chemical, usually accumulate in the **environment**.