# Decomposers Encyclopedia Article

## Decomposers

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# Decomposers

Decomposers (also called saprophages, meaning "corpse eating") are the organisms which perform the critical task of **decomposition** in **nature**. They include bacteria, **fungi**, and **detritivores** that break down dead organic matter, releasing nutrients back into the **ecosystem**. Fungi are the dominant decomposers of plant material, and bacteria primarily break down animal matter. Decomposers secrete enzymes into plant and animal material to break down the organic compounds, starting with compounds such as sugars which are easily broken down, and ending with more resistant compounds such as cellulose and lignin. Rates of decomposition are faster at higher values of moisture and temperature. Decomposers thus perform a unique and important function in the **recycling** process in nature.