

The Amazing Soil

Soil is more than that stuff under your feet as you walk across the yard. Soil is the place where plants grow. The hamburger you had for lunch, the popcorn you had for a snack or the milk you drank at supper directly or indirectly came from plants that grew in soil. Your shirt is likely made from cotton that grew in soil. Soil helps clean up wastewater and helps soak up rainwater to prevent flooding. An important drug (Aureomycin)

was discovered in soil in a Missouri research plot in 1945. We use soil a lot.

Soil varies

Some ways soil varies include soil color (which you can see with your eyes) and soil texture (how the soil feels between your fingers).

Texture (pieces of soil):

- **sand** (makes soil feel gritty)
- **silt** (makes soil feel floury)
- **clay** (makes soil feel sticky)

Color:

browns, yellows,
reds

Soil is made up of tiny bits of rock, decomposed plant and animal material, water and air. Soil is alive. Bacteria, fungi, earthworms and lots of other critters call soil home. There are more organisms in a tablespoon of soil than there are people on the earth.



This is interesting:

- There are about 2 million pounds of soil in an acre six inches deep
- It can take 500 years to form one inch of new topsoil
- There are over 70,000 different soils in the United States
- Menfro is the official soil in Missouri

Fun to Do

You can learn more about your soil by doing a fun experiment. Take soil from different areas (maybe your yard or garden, your grandparents' or other relative's, and maybe another soil that is different). Fill a glass jar about half full with each soil. Fill the jar to the top with water. Shake well. Allow it to sit overnight and then observe different layers that settle out. **Sand** particles will settle first (or on the bottom), then **silt** particles and finally **clays**. Some clays may stay in suspension for weeks. Do you notice other differences in your soils?



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