# Soil Tunnel Exploration Guide Ideas on how to educate with the

## Soil tunnel

<image>

## What Is Soil?

Soil is a naturally occurring mixture of minerals, organic matter, water, and air which has definite structure and composition and



forms on the surface of the Earth's Crust. Soil is a living ecosystem and is changing all the time.

The ideal soil consists of four components. Two of them are vital to living things on earth; water and air. The ideal soil is made up of 50% soil matter (45% mineral material and 5% organic matter), 25% air, and 25% water.



### **Soil Layers and Horizons**

A soil profile shows how the soil beneath our feet appears. Soils develop into layers called horizons. Each of these horizons differs from the other because they are made up of different textures, and physical and chemical characteristics. Because of this, each horizon looks different from the horizon above or below it.

The *E* horizon is found in forested areas. The "E" stands for eluvial, which means clay, iron, organic matter, and other minerals have been removed from this horizon. It is a zone of leaching and often appears white or lighter in color than other horizons. It is not present in every soil horizon.

The **O** horizon is the top layer. It is made up of plant litter and keeps the soil very healthy. The plant litter decomposes into nutrients that enrich the soil and form the next layer.

The **A** horizon is also called the topsoil layer and is where the roots of plants grow best. It is also where bacteria and fungi live; they help the soil stay fertile and help soil hold water. Springtails and other soil critters do their best work in the O and A horizons.

The **B horizon** is also called Subsoil. Some plants and animals have a hard time getting through the B Horizon. This layer has a lighter color and is formed from the accumulation of clay minerals and other compounds that seep down from above.

The *R* horizon or bedrock is unweathered parent material. It is a solid layer of rock found on or below the surface of the land. The R horizon is not found in all soil profiles.

The *C* horizon can be very deep. It has less live material in it than any of the layers above. The C layer is formed by parent material that is created from weathered rock.

Activity #1

#### Soil Layer Cards

Supplies Needed: Double sided carpet tape Card stock paper cut into quarters to look like pictured card Topsoil Subsoil Bedrock (fine sand sticks best to the carpet tape) Leaves or grass to put on top of topsoil (optional)

#### Pre-Lesson Set-Up:

 Cut each 81/2 x 11 sheet of paper into quarters
Collect samples of topsoil, subsoil, and bedrock (use sar bedrock) and put them into labeled containers.



#### **Directions:**

1. Give each student a card. Have them stick a piece of doubled sided tape that is 5 inches long to the left side of the card. DO NOT pull the backing off the tape. The tape should look like it is single sided right now.

2. Each student should title their card "soil layers." Using 3 lines, divide the tape into 4 even sections. (See picture.) Extend the lines out to the right side of the card.

3. Label the sections as follows from the top to the bottom: Humus (or organic matter), topsoil, subsoil, and bedrock. There is not a line for bedrock. It simply gets written in the blank spot below the third line.

4. Going from the bottom, peel the tape backing up to the bottom line and crease it.

5. Add bedrock to the section of sticky tape that is revealed after pulling the tape back off of it.

6. Continue to peel the tape backing up, stopping at each drawn line, creasing, and adding the correct material.



### HOW SOILS ACT, LOOK, AND FEEL

Soil texture is a soil property that tells the text of soil based on the amount of sand, silt, and/or clay it contains. There is more than one way to determine the texture of soil.



When soil scientists want to determine an official soil texture, they use the soil texture triangle. By doing lab tests scientists can find the percentage of each type of soil and then use the texture triangle to find the soil texture.

Another way that soil scientists determine soil texture is by performing a ribbon test. To do a ribbon test yourself you take a small sample of soil, mix it with water and push the soil between your index finger and thumb. If the soil sample feels gritty and does not ribbon then it contains a lot of sand particles. If it feels sticky and does ribbon, then it contains a lot of clay particles. If it feels smooth and partially ribbons, then it contains a lot of silt particles.





## What is Soil?



## **Relative Soil Particle Sizes**



Soil type is defined by the amount of sand, silt, and clay particles that are present in a soil sample as well as the texture or how it feels.

\*\* Clay Particles are so small a microscope is needed to see them.

# **ACTIVITY #2**

#### Loam Soil Model Lesson & Recipe

Supplies Needed:

3oz bathroom cups (3 per student) 1 labeled sand, 1 labeled silt, 1 labeled clay for each student

Salt (represents sand)

Flour (represents silt)

Corn Starch (represents clay)

Quantities of Salt, Flour, and Corn Starch: 1 – 1lb 10oz container of salt = 7 students 1 box of cornstarch = 38 students 5 lb. bag of flour = 48 students 48 fluid oz. Vegetable Oil = 100 students

Vegetable Oil (represents organic matter) Water

1 Tablespoon measuring utensil

Quart Size Ziploc bags (1 per student)

Drinking cups full of water (1 water cup per table of students)

#### Pre-Lesson Set-Up:

1. Fill one bathroom cup full of salt (labeled sand)

2. Fill one bathroom cup full of flour (labeled silt)

3. Put 1 tablespoon of cornstarch (labeled clay) in the remaining bathroom cup

4. Place a drinking cup full of water at each table

#### Directions:

- Give students their sand, silt, and clay cups. 1.
- Have a discussion and demonstration on the texture of each 2. soil, particle size, and capacity to retain water. Drop some of each material into the drinking cup of water and observe. Put clay on your finger and dip into water. Feel for a sticky material left on finger.
- 3. After investigation the students should dump each material into the Ziploc bag. Mix to add air.
- 4. Add 1 tablespoon vegetable oil to each bag. This represents the organic matter in the soil. Close bag and mix materials. Have students describe what organic matter does to the soil, based on their observations.
- 5. Add 1 tablespoon of water. Close bag and mix thoroughly. What happens?
- 6. Add 2 more tablespoons of water. Close bag and mix until a soft dough is formed into a ball. Once a ball of soil is formed students may take it out of the bag.

What would happen if too much water was added? What consistency is best for soil?

Continued on next page.

#### Additional Information:

Soil contains four ingredients – minerals (in this model, it's represented by sand, silt, and clay), water, air, and organic mater

Loam is a combination of sand, silt and clay, it generally contains more nutrients and humus than sandy soils, has better drainage and infiltration of water and air than silty soils, and is easier to till than clay soils.

Soil minerals are made from 3 particles – sand, silt, and clay. Most soils are a mixture of all 3 particles.

Another model of particle size would be a basketball (sand), baseball (silt), and a rubber bouncy ball (clay).

### URBAN SOIL PROFILE



Human activity can compact the soil and slow the downward movement of water.

Soil mottles can help identify the depth of seasonal high water table.

Proper testing is needed to help determine the limitations and capabilities of the soil. Soil acts like a sponge, soaking up rainwater and limiting storm water runoff. It impacts ground water recharge. Soils also release water for plants and animals to use. Soils store carbon and prevent its loss into the atmosphere. Soils buffer and trap pollutants such as oil, pesticides, herbicides, and heavy metals and keep them from entering groundwater supplies.

Human activities, such as excavation or other disturbances can change the way soils perform their functions. Construction activities, compaction, and surface sealing dramatically change



soil properties. This sometimes results in a reduced ability to perform the critical functions or activities of natural soils.

One function that can adversely impacted by human activity is the movement of water into the soil. This movement depends upon soil texture, soil structure, slope, bulk density, compaction, and vegetation.

During construction, vegetation is removed and most of the organic soil horizons are stripped away. This can cause storm water to run off the land too quickly. When vegetation is removed the soil is exposed to erosion. Soil particles wash away with storm water runoff, carrying pollutants to nearby water bodies. Construction vehicles can compact the soil as they move over the land surface. This compaction is accelerated



when wet soils are worked. When soil is disturbed and exposed by human activity the potential for wind erosion also occurs.

### AGRICULTURAL SOIL PROFILE

On the hill, row crops alternate with hay in contour strips across the lope. This practice of contour trip-cropping conserves soil by reventing rain runoff from washing oil down the hill.

Cropland

Plow Land

Soil that is tilled regularly is more compacted, the air spaces have been squeezed out of the soil. Water has no pathway to follow, so it sits on the surface Tilling also breaks the bacteria network, so there is less to bind the soil together. This makes the soil less healthy. These conditions are less favorable for plant growth, roots have a harder time pushing through the soil.

Crop land that is not tilled yearly has a cover of crop residue, lip corn stalks, that prevent solver erosion. This cover layer down into organic material that makes the soil rich.

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Soil horizons, or layers make up the soil profile. The weather affects the horizons closer to the surface, while the lower layers resemble the original parent material more closely. The cut away view on page 3 shows how the soil profile might look. At the surface, the O horizon has the most organic matter. Below that is the A horizon, which has less organic matter.

Generally the A horizon is darker in color than the lower horizons. Next is the E horizon, and then the B horizon. Their color may be lighter; they may also have more minerals on the surface horizons. This happens because minerals accumulate here after rainwater percolating from the surface washes them down to these levels.

When soil is tilled for farming the surface vegetation is removed and the soil lays bare. Rain can wash this bare soil and strong winds can carry soil particles away. In the early 1930's the United States endured what is known as the "dust bowl era." Overworking of the soil, coupled with an extended period of drought created severe soil erosion problems for America's farmers.



Traditional farming tills, plows, and rakes the soil to prepare it for crops. This can to lead problems like soil erosion, soil compaction. and the loss organic of and matter microscopic

soil organisms (fungi and bacteria). The organic layer is home to bacteria that holds soil clumps together. The photo portrays the thinness of the O horizon, which is caused by tilling the soil. While breaking down organic matter, microorganisms secrete glomalin, or glue, that holds soil particles together into soil clumps called peds. Fewer bacteria in the soil mean less glomalin to keep the aggregates together. If the aggregates break down, the channels in the soil that let rain water infiltrate the soil disappear. Without those channels, water will pool on the surface and cause erosion.

#### **Healthy Alternative**

One conservation practice that is used by farmers to help reduce the amount of soil lost to erosion is no-till farming. With no-till farming, seeds are planted directly into the soil, thus the O horizon remains undisturbed. The old stems and leaves of the previous crop remain on the field, protecting the soil from erosion. Bacteria break down the old crop remains to form new organic soil. The soil aggregates hold together permitting the formation of abundant channels to drain surface water into the soil. These conditions support healthy soil.

## FOREST SOIL PROFILE

Leaf litter decays on the forest floor and becomes humus (hew-mus), a rich organic part of the soil.

The roots of trees and plants have an important role in the soil ecosystem. The roots pull nutrients and water from the soil. They also help hold the soil in place.

Healthy soil is an important component of the forest ecosystem. It is a strong foundation for trees and plants to grow on, a habitat for numerous insects, fungi, and algae, and a lab where old organic matter is recycled back into the ecosystem. Trees are essential for maintaining the integrity of the soil.

Topsoil in the forest provides the best environment for growing plant roots, and microorganisms and other plant life.

Soil plays an important role in forestry. Rain water coming off trees gets trapped in the soil where it is used by trees and plants. This also serves to limit water run-off into streams and filters impurities from the water. If trees are removed, the soil is more at risk for erosion, or the washing away of soil.

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Upland forest

Soil is most vulnerable to erosion after the removal of surface litter from trees and plants. Water runoff carries sediment and deposits it in stream beds, deltas, and oceans. The resulting siltation or the depositing of sediment, in stream beds causes increased flooding and pollution. Modern tree harvesting systems can greatly minimize soil disturbance. One of the key components of sustainable forestry is to keep soil in place. Roots hold the soil together and anchor it in place.

## WETLAND SOIL PROFILE

A siamp is a wetland that has woody vegtation, such as trees and shrubs. When the vegetation dies, it sinks to the bottom of the swamp and becomes and of the organic matter in the O horizon.

Wetland

When soil is saturated with water, the water fills in all the tiny air spaces in the soil. Without air, the minerals undergo a chemical reaction, and the water leaches them into the lower horizons. The minerals change color, appearing grayish-bue in the soil. This is called play.

Wellinds can be seasonal or permanent trade: Covers land for ten days during teg downg teason, the land can be considered a welland. Arganh can be satistrater, as in a tidal Transh. or a satistrater, as in a tidal Transh. or a welland that has here here parts. There may be just one kind of plant plants. There may be just one kind of plant there there there there there there there are the total or plants. When the there are the total or plants. When the there are the total or grants. the soil dries of, the minerals orm clumps alled motiles. Finding a notified soil indicates that a full is hydric, meaning that the very wet for a length of time. A swamp is a wetland that has woody vegetation, such as tree and shrubs. When the vegetation dies, it sinks to the bottom of the swamp and becomes part of the organic matter in the O horizon.

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If the soils dries out, the minerals form clumps called mottles. Finding a mottle soil indicates that a soil is hydric, meaning that is was very wet for a length of time.

Wetlands can be seasonal or permanent. If water covers land for an extended period during the growing season, the land can be considered a wetland. A marsh can be saltwater, as in a tidal marsh, or it can be freshwater. A marsh is a wetland that has herbaceous plants. There may be just one kind of plant, or a small variety of plants. When the plants die, they sink to the bottom of the marsh, forming a very thick organic layer, horizon O.



#### What is a wetland?

Wetlands are areas where the soil is always wet or wet frequently enough to be populated by plants specially adapted to wet soils. In order for an area to be considered a wetland, it must possess water, wetland plants, and wetland soils.

#### Wetlands...

1. Absorb excess water to protect us from floods and storm urges.

 Filter and cleanse water that replenishes the aquifers and wells from which we drink.
Provide homes for many important animal and plant species.

4. Support the multibilion dollar seafood industry and multimillion dollar recreation industry.

5. Are a source of foods, such as cranberries

Wetlands may be freshwater or saltwater, inland or tidal. Sometimes they are lowlands where draining water accumulates as snow melts. Sometimes they begin as lakes that fill with soil. Depending on the region, a wetland may be called a bog, a more, a fen, a swamp, or a marsh. Each area has different characteristics. Swamps and marches, while similar to each other, have differences. Swamps are freshwater, have more woody vegetation such as trees or shrubs, and may be wet for a long time. Marshes can be either fresh or saltwater, and often look like fields of grasses.

#### Wetlands Soil Profile

The soils found in a wetland area are very different from soils found in a backyard or in a forest because these soils have been under water. Below the wetland that is a thick organic layer that comes from decaying plants that lived in the wetland. Below the O horizon is an A horizon. If this soil becomes saturated, the water will seep into all the tiny air spaces. This water will leach the minerals from the soil, moving them to the grayish-blue. This is called gley. If this soil dries out, the minerals will reappear as brighter colored small clumps called mottles. The presence of mottles is a good indicator that the soil has been very wet for a long time. Soils with these conditions are called hydric soils.

## CHEMISTRY CYCLES IN SOILS

The release of nutrients into the soil is very important process. There are three main nutrient cycles that affect soil. They are the nitrogen cycle, the phosphorus cycle, and the carbon cycle. Without these cycles plants and organisms would be unable to flourish in soil. These cycles not only affect the soil but the environment as well.







## STORMWATER POLLUTION AND PREVENTION



#### **Stormwater Interesting Facts**

- Soil and silt in the water increase water temperature and murkiness, which harm fish and their food supply.
- Decaying leaves and organic materials in the storm drain increase bacteria and mosquito production and decrease oxygen essential for fish life.
- Fertilizer from your lawn can cause excessive algae growth and oxygen depletion.
- One gallon of oil in the storm drain can pollute up to one million gallons of storm water.
- Our wastewater is cleaned and treated before it goes into the creek. Stormwater runoff flows through the storm drain system and into the creek untreated.
- The three largest sources of storm water pollution are: herbicides and pesticides from agriculture, urban runoff, and sediment from construction sites.

## Activity #3

#### **Conservation Service Learning Project**

#### Only Rain Down the Drain

Storm drains, commonly called storm sewers, line our streets in urban settings. Their purpose is to take the water off the roads during a heavy storm and keep the roads safe for travel by preventing flooded streets. These storm drains are piped directly to our closest creeks and rivers. As a result, anything on the road, sidewalk, or your driveway that is swept into the storm drain is carried directly to our waterways. This generally includes oil from cars and trucks, salt from treating the roads in the winter, soap from washing cars, fertilizers and pesticides from our lawns, and litter. All of these items can have harmful effects on the water quality in our streams.

#### **Details**

- Raise awareness on water pollution prevention by participating in Storm Drain Labeling.
- Encounter a local watershed community
- Investigate different land use practices in the watershed
- Engage in an environmental action project, Storm Drain Labeling, (SDL)
- Help others understand how good land use practices can benefit watersheds
- This project is done in the City of Powell

#### How it is Completed

- ✓ Adults lead small teams of youth to assigned areas during labeling activities, or complete the project with family, friends, or neighbors.
- ✓ Work as buddies to assess and remove pollutants near the storm drains on public property
- Apply labels to the drains

#### Time Commitment

Individuals would spend about 2.5 hours on this project.

#### How to Arrange a Storm Drain Labeling Event:

Contact Erin Wolfe at the Delaware Soil and Water Conservation District at 740/368-1921, or <u>ewolfe@co.delaware.oh.us</u> with questions and to arrange a storm drain labeling event.







## WHAT LIVES IN SOIL?

An incredible diversity of organisms makes up the soil food web. They range in size from the tiniest one-celled bacteria, algae, fungi, and protozoa, to the more complex nematodes and micro-arthropods, to the visible earthworms, insects, small vertebrates, and plants.

As these organisms eat, grow, and move through the soil. They make it possible to have clean water, clean air, healthy plants, and moderated water flow.

There are many ways that the soil food web is an integral part of landscape processes. Soil organisms decompose organic compounds, including manure, plant residue, and pesticides, preventing them from entering water and becoming pollutants. They sequester nitrogen and other nutrients that might otherwise enter groundwater, and they fix nitrogen from the atmosphere, making it available to plants. Many organisms enhance soil aggregation and porosity, increasing infiltration and reducing runoff. Soil organisms prey on crop pests and are food for larger animals.



### Earthworm Facts Did you know...?

- There are approximately 1 million earthworms per one acre of land!
- Earthworms do not have lungs, but breathe through their skin!
- Earthworms have 5 hearts!
- The largest earthworm was found in South Africa, measuring 22 feet long!
- Worm castings are rich in nutrients that are essential for plant growth!
- Earthworms do not have eyes but can sense light!
- If an earthworm's skin dries out, it will die!

Soil is FULL of livings things. There is a whole community, or ecosystem, living right under your feet! If you scooped up a handful of soil and looked at it under a microscope, you would find millions of creatures that rely on the soil to live.



#### Let's Take A Look

**Bacteria** help break down dead plant and animals materials, and make a slime to help particles stick together. The slime helps to hold water in the soil.

**Amoebas** help recycle nutrients in the soil by eating bacteria and then depositing nutrients in the soil. Plants need nutrients to grow.

Fungi break down the decaying organic material.

**Mites** break down the organic material into nutrients that other organisms rely on for food.

**Roundworms** eat bacteria and mites and add nutrients to the soil. Without them bacteria could take over the soil!

**Springtails** chew up dead grass and leaves into smaller pieces that are decomposed by fungi and bacteria. They also release nutrients plants need to eat diseases caused by bacteria.

Many other critters such as **earthworms**, **ants**, **centipedes**, **spiders**, **snakes**, **moles**, and **shrews** make soil their home.

# Activity #4

#### Soil Organism Dig

- 1. Discuss with the students how to 'gently' sort through the soil and observe what they find. This is best done inside the classroom, prior to engaging in the activity.
- 2. Model a safe and efficient digging technique using a spade, shovel, or fork depending on the plot. Suggested sample size is not deeper than 50cm.
- 3. Have students find a place where they will be able to dig in the soil. The best places to look are underneath rocks, logs, or other damp and dark places.
- 4. Using the sheet one the following page, have the students try to find the soil organisms on the sheet in the soil.
- 5. Use containers, sheets of paper or paper plates, to enable students to look more closely at things that they find in the soil.
- 6. Discuss with students how you might sort and classify the things you find. For example: living and non-living; with legs or without legs; with wings or without wings; bigger than one centimeter or smaller than one centimeter; animal or plants etc.

#### **Possible Adaptations:**

- If the weather is making observation difficult, take small samples into the classroom to examine. At or near the end of the lesson, return the sample and any living organisms to where they were collected. It may be helpful to keep a note of which sample came from where.
- Reduce or increase the number of different sites
- Repeat in another environment where you have permission such as a rural area, a wetland, forest ecosystem, etc.
- Repeat over time do the seasons effect what lives in soil?
- Make changes to the soil to increase the soil biodiversity. Develop a scientific investigation to observe and record findings.



### **POLLUTION OR HISTORY?**

Digging in the soil, what treasures will you find? Will you find trash? An artifact? Maybe even a bone? Over the years, archeologists have made exciting discoveries that have taught us about history by what they have found in the soil. Paleontologists, or scientists who study

prehistoric life, are able to figure out how old a dinosaur bone is by which soil layer its fossilized remains were found.

Items you find in the soil can help you



learn about civilizations that lived in the same area where we live today. Often archeologists can find tools; pottery and jewelry that tell you how often advanced people were in that community.

Have you ever dug a hole in your backyard and gotten excited to find an artifact? An artifact can be anything from a piece of glass to an arrowhead. Some things that are found in soil may just be discarded trash that isn't an exciting treasure, and can be harmful for the environment. What if all the soil in your yard was full of someone else's trash? It takes hundreds to thousands of years for plastic, glass, Styrofoam cup to disintegrate or break down and decay.

#### **Miamian Soil**

Miamian soils are the most extensive soils in Ohio. They occur on more than 750,000 acres in the state. They are productive soils. Corn, soybeans, and winter wheat are the primary crops grown in Ohio soils.



Surface Layer: dark grayish brown silt loam

Subsoil – upper: dark yellowish brown clay loam

Subsoil – lower: yellowish brown clay and clay loam

Substratum: yellowish brown loam

**Miamian Soil Profile** 

This project was made possible through a grant received from the Ohio Environmental Education Fund.

Delaware Soil and Water Conservation District is proud to be able to have the opportunity to share this great project, and to educate both children and adults through this educational display.

If you have any questions, please contact our office: 557-A Sunbury Road (State Route 36/U.S. Route 37 E.) Delaware, Ohio 43015

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