



Tap into the Wonders Beneath Your Feet: Dig Up the Dirt on Soil!

Ever imagine finding buried treasure? You don't need a map any longer! It's everywhere, and you may not even know it. Look beneath your feet for the most important treasure: soil!

Soil is the tiny particles of plant, animal and mineral material that have broken down over time. There is a whole other world just waiting to be explored, the world of soil—sometimes known as dirt.

Many organisms make the soil their home. Microorganisms, worms, flower roots, and beetles are just a few of the many millions. These creatures make the dirt possible. They break down matter and add nutrients to the soil to make it healthy.

Soil has many predators. Weather, such as rain and wind, can cause soil to be eroded. Erosion is the wearing away of soil and can cause many problems for the soil on riverbanks, in parking lots, and near cliffs. Erosion can cause soil to carry pollutants downstream and into the bay or [along the] watershed. When this happens, aquatic life, plants, and humans can be harmed. This is why trees and grasses are important. They hold the soil in place with their roots.

Droughts can also cause problems for soil. If there isn't enough rain, the soil will become dried out. This makes the soil much easier to be blown away by the wind.

To keep nutrients in the soil and to ward [off] erosion, farmers have to learn special crop planting techniques. Crop rotation is when farmers switch the crop they plant in a certain area every year. They do this so the soil stays healthy and

their crops stay healthy. Terracing is where farmers plant crops in a crooked line or on an area cut out of a hillside. This is to keep the soil protected from erosion.

What if, one morning, you got up and looked out of the window but didn't see any animals, plants, or really anything? If there wasn't any dirt, we wouldn't be able to plant things for us to eat or to feed our animals. If there weren't any dirt, there would just be bare rock! Does that sound good? No, it doesn't. It just shows how much soil affects our daily lives.

Humans have a major effect on soil. They can damage it by littering, being careless, polluting the water, using excessive amounts of fertilizers, and so much more. Humans can also clean soil up, plant more trees and grasses against erosion, and contribute to the well being of the soil. We must remember that if we pollute the soil, the water will become polluted, and a whole pollution cycle will begin!

It is our job to protect the soil and use it wisely. Join in the effort to maintain a healthy environment ... and don't forget the dirt!

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