

2024 LEBANON COUNTY ENVIROTHON MIDDLE SCHOOL

SOILS & LAND USE OBJECTIVES



ESSENTIAL TOPICS

1. **Basic Soils Knowledge**
 - a. Formation and drainage
 - b. Basic chemical and physical properties of soil
 - c. Types and effects of soil erosion
 - d. Observing and identifying soil properties/textures
 - e. Soil biota
 - f. Soil health indicators
2. **Land Use & Conservation**
 - a. Tradeoffs: economic vs. environmental
 - b. Land capabilities: prime farmland, unique lands, preservation
 - c. Topographic map features & effects
 - d. Ways to improve soil health
3. **Application: Using a Soil Survey**
 - a. Soil interpretations

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of the soils unit, students should be able to:

1. **Basic Soils Knowledge:**
 - Describe how soils are formed and how soil drainage/percolation is affected by soil type and texture.
 - Identify the components of soil and how these components determine its function.
 - Explain how the type of soil and topography affects soil erosion.
 - Identify the 3 main soil particles by sight, touch, and characteristics.
 - Identify soil texture from hands-on sample or from textural triangle.
 - Describe the essential role of soil biota in soil health.
 - Identify soil health indicators.
2. **Land Use:**
 - Identify features/symbols on a topographic map and interpret slope/drainage/land uses.
 - Apply basic soil knowledge in making environmentally sound land use decisions when given a set of known facts. (e.g. type of crop or trees to grow in Weikert soil – soil survey charts; OR easiest route to hike – topo map)
 - Identify land capabilities/uses by soil type and topography.
 - Identify key characteristics in soils which are used in determining the health/quality of the soil.
 - Identify ways to improve soil health.
3. **Application:**
 - Use a soil survey to describe and interpret soil uses, types, drainage, average temperatures, rainfall, crop yields, woodland management, building site, & sanitary development. (Soil Survey (1981) pp. 96-121).

TESTING RESOURCES:

1. Lebanon County Soil Survey: *(Soil Surveys provided in past, no longer in print.)*
 - Web Soil Survey at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/> (click “Start WSS” button)
2. Topographic Map – (Web Applications)
 - Topographic Map Symbols - <https://www.topozone.com/topographic-map-legend-symbols/>
 - <https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-a-topographic-map>
 - <https://www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/national-geospatial-program/topographic-maps>
 - <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/topo-maps-how-to-use.html>
 - <https://www.thoughtco.com/topographic-maps-overview-1435657>
3. Rangeland Soil Quality – Soil Biota (PDF)
4. Soil Biology and Land Management (PDF)
5. Soil Quality Information Sheets (5 total): (PDFs)
 - Soil Quality Introduction
 - Organic Matter
 - Compaction
 - Soil Erosion
 - Sediment Deposition on Cropland
6. Guide to Texture by Feel & Soil Textural Triangle (PDF)

Highlighted materials are available as separate attachments at <https://www.lccd.org/ethonobjectives>

Additional reference materials are available at:

- <http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/>
- <http://www.envirothonpa.org/station/soils-and-land-use/>

ENVIROTHON
SOILS INFORMATION PROVIDED BY JOHN CHIBIRKA
RESOURCE SOIL SCIENTIST, USDA, NRCS
(THIS INFORMATION PROVIDED TO ASSIST WITH THE SOILS OBJECTIVES)

ESSENTIAL TOPICS

1. BASIC SOILS KNOWLEDGE

- Formation
- Water in soils
- Soil horizons
- Hands on investigation
- Soil quality, fertility, and chemistry
- Soil biology and diversity

2. UNDERSTANDING MAPS, SURVEYS, AND LANDFORMS

- Soil survey maps and data tables; Websoilsurvey
- Topographic maps
- Landforms and geologic terms

3. LAND USE

- Agriculture and conservation practices
- Current environmental concerns and land use issues
- Soils and history
- Pollution remediation
- Identification and benefits of wetlands
- Carbon sequestration

4. DECISION MAKING AND PROTECTION OF SOILS

- Scenarios
- Actions at home and school

IMPORTANCE OF SOILS

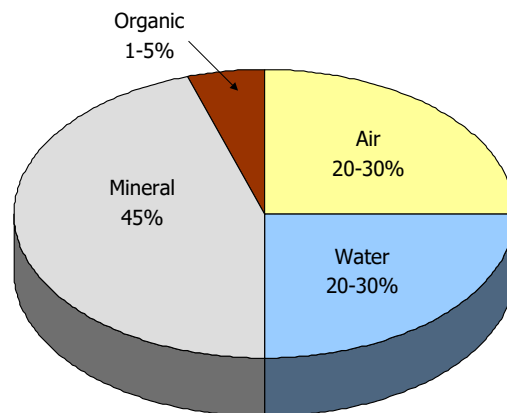
- Food – directly or indirectly
- Fiber (trees, cotton, etc.)
- Fuel (wood, ethanol, corn & pellets)
- Buildings - foundations
- Recycles and detoxifies waste

SOIL DEFINITION

- A living, naturally occurring dynamic system at the interface of air and rock. Soil forms in response to forces of climate and organisms that act on parent material in a specific landscape (topography) over a period of time.

WHAT IS SOIL COMPOSED OF?

- Mineral Material
- Organic Matter (dead plants, animals, microorganisms)
Soil teaspoon -100 million bacteria – 50,000 species (kinds)
- Living Organisms
- Air
- Water



HOW SOILS ARE FORMED? – SOIL FORMING FACTORS

Soil forming factors

- Climate
 - Organisms (biological factors)
 - Parent Material
 - Topography (also called relief or landscape position)
 - Time
- *memory trick (Clorpt)

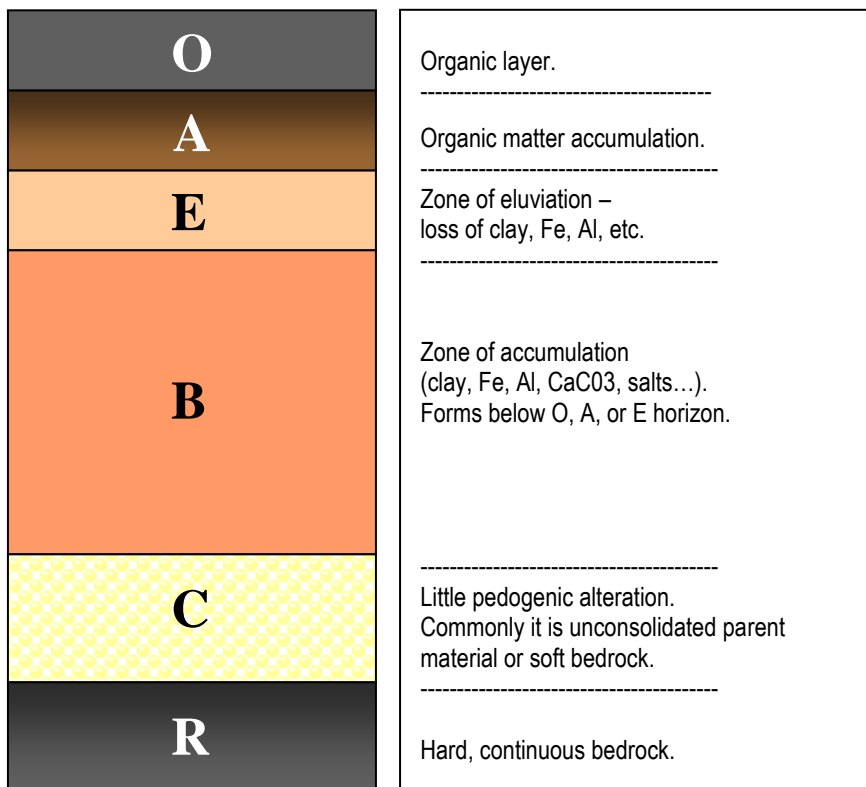
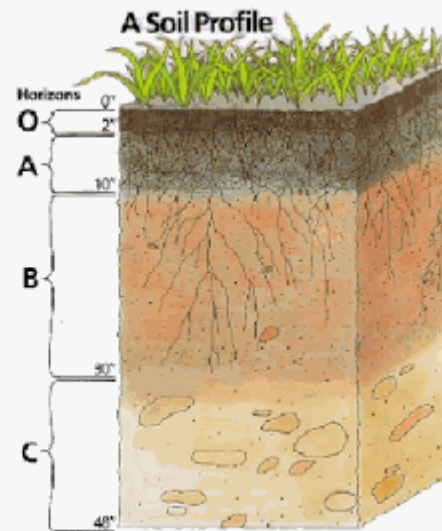
MAJOR TYPES OF PARENT MATERIALS:

- Minerals and rocks
 - Residual (weathered in place)
 - Transported - Colluvial
- Water transported – alluvial (floodplains, alluvial terraces)
- Glacial deposits (transported by ice)
- Wind deposits (loess, eolian sand)
- Marine (sea) and lacustrine (freshwater lakes) deposits

SOIL HORIZONS

A layer of soil, approximately parallel to the surface, having distinct characteristics produced by soil forming processes.

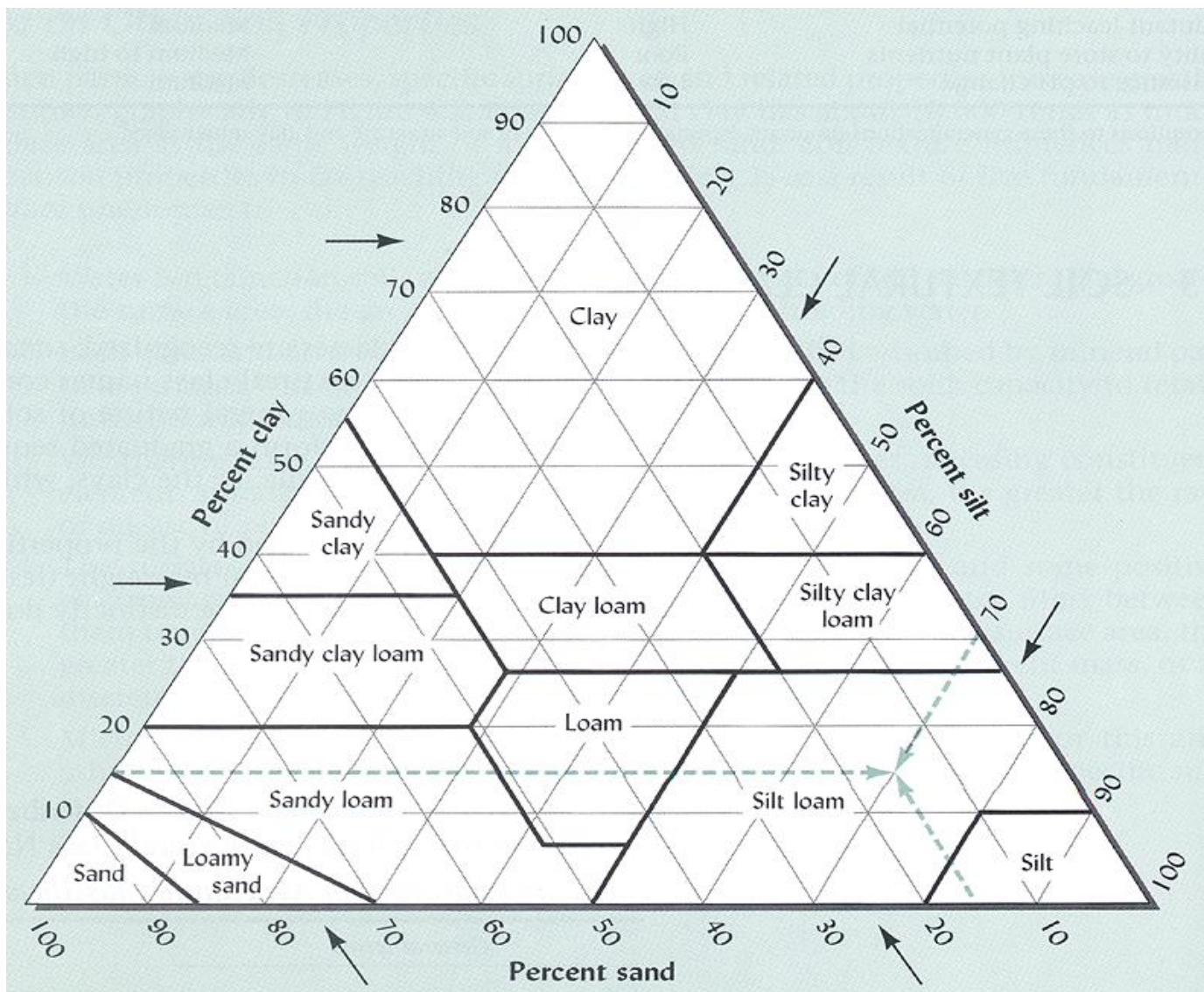
Used to classify the soil and make interpretations.



- The above horizons are common in Pennsylvania. Most soils do not contain every horizon.
- How do we differentiate horizons? (changes in color, texture, structure, roots, redoximorphic features (mottling) or other.

SOIL TEXTURE – SAND, SILT, CLAY

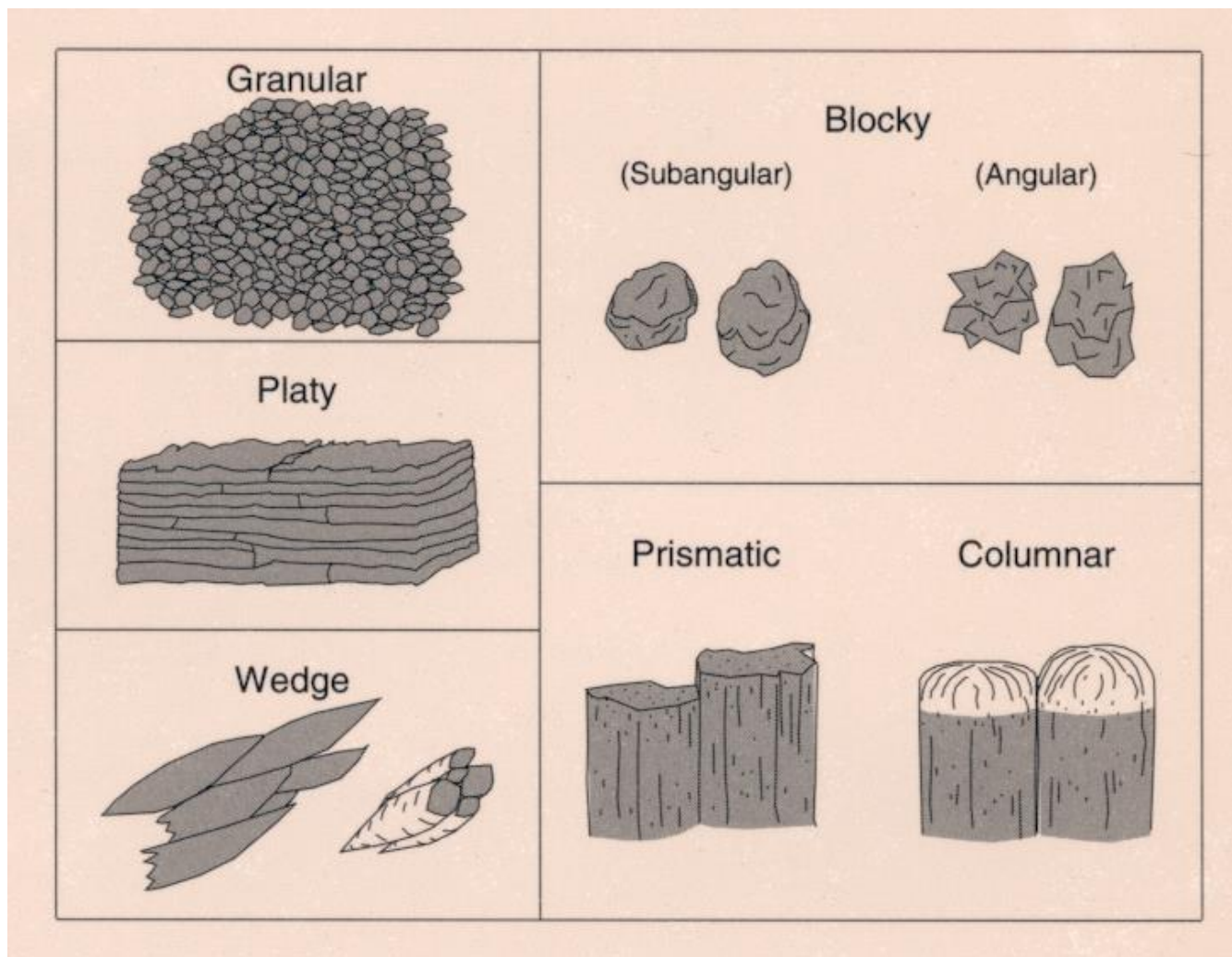
- Sand - feels gritty
 - Silt - feels floury
 - Clay - sticky when wet
 - Loams – mixture of materials
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- High silt soils and loams are most conducive to plant growth
 - How does texture affect water in soils?
 - The soil textural triangle and the key to soil texture by feel are to be available for the test.



Soil Textural Triangle

SOIL STRUCTURE

- The naturally occurring arrangement of soil particles. Each individual unit is called a ped. Near surface soil structure is often influenced by land use and management.



SOIL COLOR

Determined by air and water drainage, organic matter, parent material

- Topsoil – dark organic matter – vegetation, soil critters
- Subsoil – less OM
- Red soils – often high iron, well-drained (example of a rusty pipe)
- Wet Soil - Lack of oxygen (air) – leads to grey colors and redoximorphic concentrations and depletions (mottling)

SOIL pH

- Affects the availability of several plant nutrients.
- A pH range of 6 to 7 is generally favorable for plant growth sources. This is considered neutral to slightly acidic.
- Great diversity of pH difference in Pennsylvania, although soils are more likely to be acidic than alkaline.
- Low pH soils can be adjusted by adding lime. High pH soils can be adjusted by adding sulfur or sulfuric acid.

Soil Survey

Designed to:

- Delineate different soils across the landscape
- Predict soil behavior for different uses
- Highlight limitations and hazards inherent in the soil

Includes:

- Text
 - General description
 - Map units descriptions
 - Use and Management
- Interpretive tables
- Maps

Over 70,000 different kinds of soil have been delineated in the United States. In a soil survey, soils are classified into map units which consist of one or more soil series within a slope class. A soil series (or soil type) has a combination of traits unique to it such as parent material, texture, drainage, and landscape position.

Slope gradient (or slope) is the steepness of the land. It is the rise or fall in a given distance and is usually measured in percent. Example: If a hillside is 100 feet long and drops 10 feet in elevation from the top of the slope to the bottom of the slope, then the slope is 10%.

Delineated on the maps are individual Map units. These show the different soil series (types) across the landscape. The first letter denotes the soil series and special feature, the last large letter denotes the slope phase.