

Name _____

Ever Wonder....

What is soil?



Soil is made up mostly of bits of weathered rock, minerals, and hummus. Hummus is what is left over when dead organic matter - like plants and animals - has been broken down by microorganisms, so that its nutrients can be reused by other living things. The other things in soil include water, air and bacteria. Layers of soil build up over time. The layers are called soil horizons. The top horizon, or layer, is called top soil. Top soil is dark brown, and contains a lot of hummus, since decomposed plants and animals settle down into the surface of the soil. There are also not too many rocks in top soil, and they are very small. Top soil is the horizon in which plants take root, and small, burrowing animals live. The next horizon below is called the subsoil. Subsoil is lighter in color. It contains less hummus than top soil, and more rocks. The dirt is also packed more tightly. Have you ever tried to dig a really deep hole, only to find that the dirt gets harder to dig into the deeper your hole gets? That's because you've hit the subsoil. The roots of really big plants can go deep enough to penetrate the subsoil. The last, and lowest, soil horizon contains no hummus. It is usually clay or sand, and big chunks of rock. It is even harder to dig here, as the dirt is even more tightly packed, and nothing grows here. Under this last horizon is solid rock - bedrock - which is platform on which all soil rests.

1. *Hummus* means: _____
2. *Organic* means: _____
3. *Horizon* means: _____
4. *Bedrock* means: _____