

ILLINOIS

Junior Ag Mag

Soil Keeps Us Alive!

Soil is important because we need it to live. Read on to learn more about the amazing soil under your feet.



Soil

The soil under our feet is as important as the air we breathe and the water we drink. If we did not have soil, we would not have any food. All life on Earth depends on the soil. But how much do you know about soil?

Soil is made up of organic matter, minerals, water, air, and many critters who live in the soil. Most of these critters are too tiny for us to see without a microscope.



The main parts of soil are sand, silt, and clay. The mixture of these three parts creates different types of soil. There are over 700 types of soil just in Illinois.

Soil gives plants nutrients to grow. Sometimes we eat these plants. We also feed plants to farm animals. Farmers work hard to protect the soil so we can grow food for many years to come.



If we want good food to eat, we need to take care of our soil.
What can you do to help protect the soil in your community?

Layers of Soil

Soil is made of many different layers. Most of the food we eat is produced from the topsoil layer. Erosion is the wearing away of the land by forces like water, wind, and ice. Farmers try to prevent erosion so the topsoil stays in place. Then they can grow healthy food for us year after year.



Critters in the Soil

Soil is full of life. In one tablespoon of healthy soil there are more organisms than there are people on Earth. Some of these organisms we can see. Others we need to use a microscope to see.

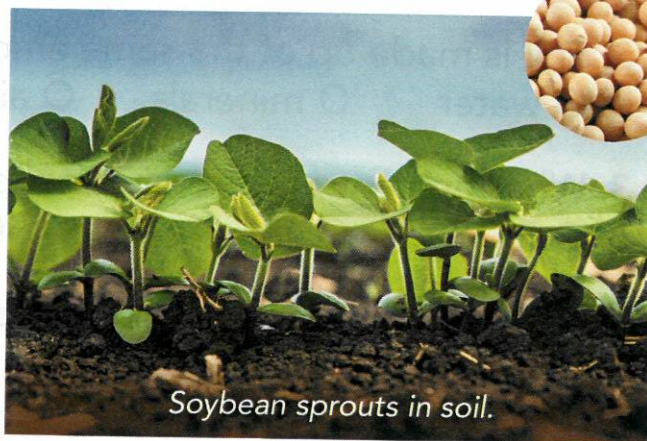
One acre of cropland (*about the size of a football field*) is home to more than 1,400,000 earthworms.



Illinois Soil

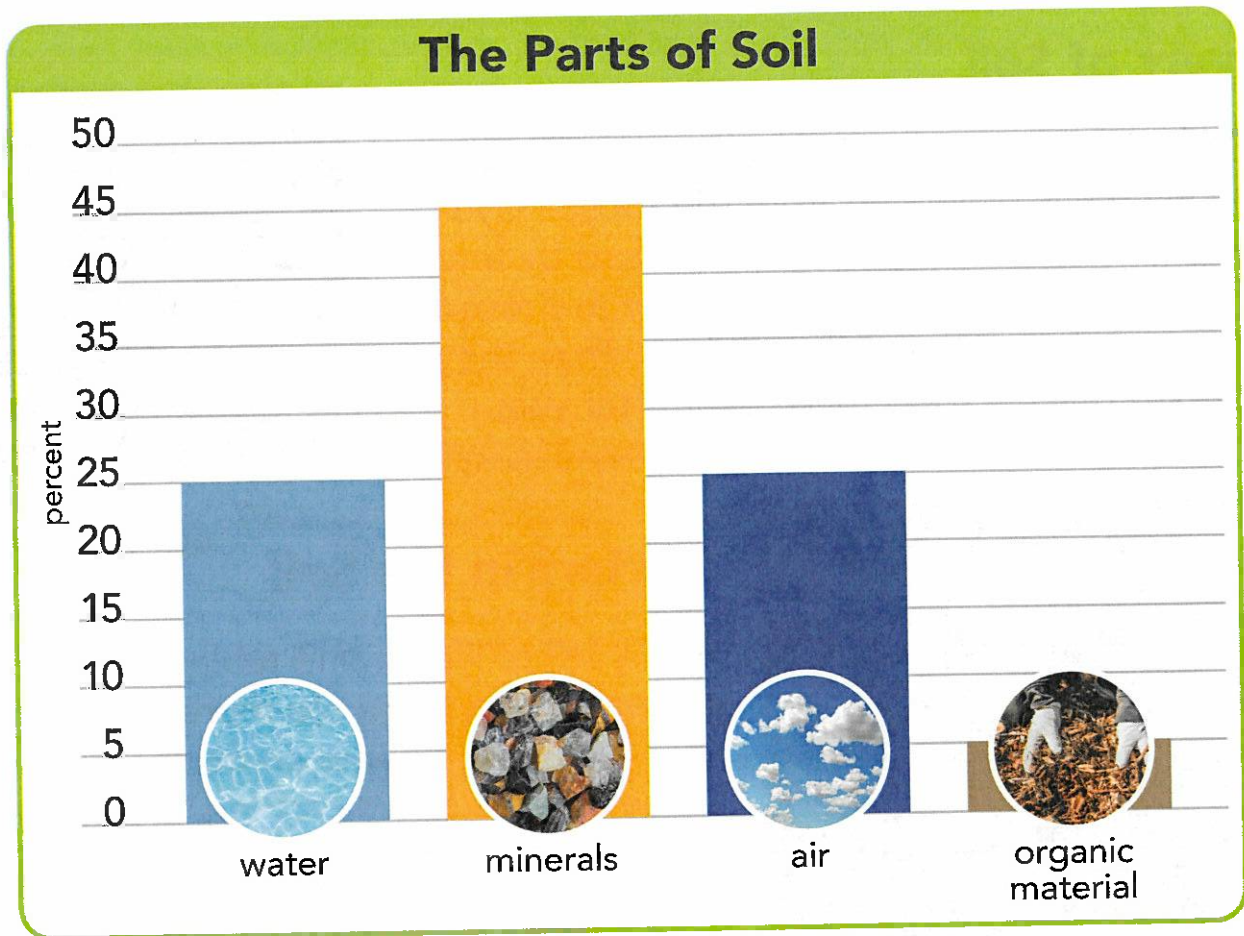


Corn sprouts in soil.



Soybean sprouts in soil.

Illinois has some of the best soil in the world. Most of our state's land is used to produce food. The main crops grown in Illinois are corn and soybeans.



The graph above shows the different parts of soil. Use the chart to answer the following questions.

1. Which part of soil makes up the largest portion?
☐ water ☐ minerals ☐ air ☐ organic material
2. Soil is made up of the same amounts of which two parts?
☐ water ☐ minerals ☐ air ☐ organic material
3. What percent of the soil is made up of organic matter?
☐ 5 ☐ 15 ☐ 30 ☐ 45

Write one way you could help protect the soil around you.
