Soil

Soil covers much of the surface of the land. It is formed of particles of weathered rock mixed with organic material, which is material that was once living, such as dead leaves.

Sand, silt and clay

Soil contains a mix of sand, silt and clay. Sand is the largest of the three particles. These particles come from the weathering of rocks. A clay soil does not allow water to drain easily through it. In contrast, a sandy soil allows water to drain easily, but the soil dries up in summer. Loam has a good mix of sand, silt and clay and this creates a soil that is good for growing crops.

Humus

Fallen leaves and other parts of plants break down to form humus. Humus is good for the soil. It helps to increase the drainage, makes the soil easier to work and provides nutrients to the plants.

Soil erosion

Soil needs protection from the weather. This is usually provided by plant cover as their roots hold the soil together. However, if the plant cover is removed, the soil is exposed to the weather. Then the soil may be washed or blown away. This is called soil erosion.

Q and A

Q. What is a soil profile?

A. This is a vertical cut made down through the soil to the rock, which reveals all the different layers that make up the soil. A good, loamy soil used for farming will extend deep into the ground, but some soils are really thin, such as those that occur over chalk.