

Area 3

WHAT IS SOIL?

When you hear the word “soil” what comes to mind? Perhaps gardening, farming or childhood memories of playing outside? I remember making mud pies and dirt pies when the rain had not fallen; coming inside filthy dirty, with a smile on my face. Soil is defined as, the upper layer of earth that may be dug or plowed and in which plants grow. This definition makes soil seem as though it is only beneficial to farmers. However, civil engineers, water company employers and gardeners are only a few of the many career options that use and benefit from the soil. Not only is soil required in many Kentucky careers, but you and I, each and every day benefit from the use of soil. Read on to discover exactly what soil is, how soil is used in everyday careers and how we benefit from soil as individuals. My goal is that you will learn the importance of soil and take action in Kentucky soil conservation.

Soil and dirt are the same thing, correct? False, soil and dirt are two different things with different components. Soil is “The unconsolidated mineral or organic material on the immediate surface of the earth that serves as a natural medium for the growth of land plants.” There are many important functions that soil performs, depending on where it is located. After all, soil differs in its make up due to 5 different factors. These factors include: climate, organisms, landscape, parent material and time. On the other hand, dirt is soil that is out of place in the world, such as, under your fingernails. Momma always claimed I tracked dirt into the house, not soil; it seems as though she knew what she was talking about way back then. Dirt is soil that has lost its ability to support life, in other words dirt is dead soil. Now you know the difference

between the soil that you play in outside and the dirt that you tracked into your mothers house, as a youth.

When asked who works in a career that involves soil, who comes to mind? The first career mentioned by most is a farmer. I recall as a young child, riding on the tractor with my Papaw working in the hay and tobacco fields. Little did I know that I was taking a part in conserving Kentucky's soil. Farmers work with soil in plowing fields and crop rotation. After all crop rotation is performed to maintain soil fertility, soil organic matter levels and soil structure. A career that many overlook being involved with soil is a civil engineer, who builds roadways and large structures. In doing so they are required to move soil to and from the site, to ensure a sturdy and effective foundation. You may be thinking that your career isn't involved in soil, that may be true, but you can get involved. Gardening is a hobby that anyone can participate in from growing and producing vegetables to cultivating a small window box. Each spring I plant a small garden near my barn. The fresh vegetables are amazing and the fact I am helping in Kentucky soil conservation makes it that much better.

Soil impacts every aspect of our lives, from the clothes we wear, to the food we eat and houses that we live in. As soon as I woke this morning, soil had already impacted me; by supporting the growth of cotton which was used to make my 100% cotton shirt. The most common role that soil plays is its ability to serve as a growth place for all types of plants, including: crops and flowers alike. Crops provide us with reliable food sources and items from which we manufacture clothing. Additionally, flowers make beautiful scenery for everyone to enjoy and provide a food source for animals. Due to the large amount of pollution and wide variety of uses of water it is required that it be purified before human consumption. The soil acts

as a living filter to clean water before it moves into an aquifer. Finally, this morning you woke up in a house which has a foundation and traveled on a roadbed. Again we have soil to thank. As you can see, soil affects every aspect of our lives from the time we awake in the mornings, until we go to bed in the evenings.

Soil isn't just used by farmers, we all use soil in our everyday lives. Soil is a natural resource that we can't imagine using up or running out of. However, the truth is we need to be more concerned with the well being of our planet and minimize pollution. You may think that as an individual you can not make a difference, but this is far from the truth, small steps have an impact. You may notice soil erosion on your land. You can protect the soil by planting grass, flowers or other plants. Another option is making use of a rain barrel, by placing it underneath a downspout in order to collect water that runs off your roof. By using a rain barrel you are using water and soil conservation at the same time. I find using a rain barrel at my barn to be very beneficial. With the water collected, I water my garden in the summer and my animals year round. Therefore, I am cutting my water bill and practicing good Kentucky soil conservation. These are only a few of the many options to get involved in soil conservation. After all, you now know the importance of soil in careers and our everyday lives. I enjoy and cherish the memories I have of playing in the dirt and working with soil as a young child. We need to ensure these opportunities for future generations. Do your part to ensure healthy Kentucky soil for future generations, to live on.

Works Cited

"10 Ways to Conserve Soil." *LoveToKnow*. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

<http://greenliving.lovetoknow.com/10_Ways_to_Conserve_Soil>.

"K-12 Soil Science Teacher Resources." *Teachers Guide- It's Not Dirt*. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

<<http://www.soils4teachers.org/lessons-and-activities/teachers-guide/its-not-dirt>>.

"Natural Resources Conservation Service." *What Is Soil Conservation?* Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/home/?cid=nrcs143_021978>.

"Soil Careers." *Soil-Net.com* -. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

<http://www.soil-net.com/dev/page.cfm?pageid=secondary_whatelse_soilcareers&loginas=anon_secondary>.

"Soil." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

<<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/soil>>.

MLA formatting by BibMe.org.