

Soil is arguably one of the Earth's most critical natural resources. It is a substance that few people understand and most take for granted. Soil makes up the outer layer of the earth's surface, it nourishes the plants we eat, the animals and the thriving underground kingdom of bacteria, fungi, protozoa, earthworms and other microbes that are critical to the planet's food web.

Soil is the foundation of the world's supply; but exactly how much soil do we have? Look at the entire earth—75% of the earth is covered with water in our oceans, lakes, rivers and streams. The remaining 25% represents land. More than half of that land is desert, polar or mountainous regions where it is too hot, too cold or too high to be productive. That leaves us with 12.5%, which includes land that is limited by terrain, fertility or too much rainfall. Because some of this land is too rocky, steep, shallow or wet to sustain food production, we are left with a very small fragment of the land area—about 10%—which represents the soil upon which the entire world depends for its food supply. And this small amount competes with a variety of other soil uses including housing, cities, schools, hospitals, shopping centers, landfills and more. Soil is a precious natural resource.

Topsoil is the most productive soil layer and the layer that is the first lost due to soil erosion. Erosion occurs naturally because of wind, water and ice acting on any exposed rock or soil surface. Human activities are responsible for 90-80% of all erosion. A single rain storm can wash away centuries-old accumulations of soil from damaged, neglected or badly managed ground. In many places, soils are eroding faster than they can be rebuilt. Though a renewable resource in theory, soil forms slowly. For all practical purposes, the soil we lose to erosion will never be replaced in our lifetime. It can take up to 500 years to form 1 inch of topsoil.

Since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, the protection of soil from erosion and degradation has greatly increased through the formation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and several state and federal agencies. These conservation groups assist landowners and the general public through education and technical assistance aimed at the proper management of soil. Contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District to see how you can become more involved in conservation activities in your local community. To find your local district, visit www.nacdnet.org/general-resources/conservation-district-directory/

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Stewardship Week is one of the largest conservation-related observances. The nation's 3,000 conservation districts manage soil and water conservation programs in virtually every community in the United States. Since 1955, NACD has sponsored the national Stewardship Week program by selecting a theme and developing materials for schools and communities. **Stewardship Week, celebrated annually between the last Sunday in April and the first Sunday in May,** reminds us of our personal responsibility to care for the natural resources upon which we all depend. The celebration and observance of stewardship lasts for more than just one week—it continues throughout the entire year. The concept of stewardship involves personal and social responsibility. We have a duty to be wise and effective stewards of natural resources in our daily lives.



National Association of
Conservation Districts

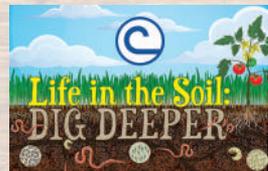
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