

Try It: Lovely Dirt "Layer Cake"

Do you ever get mucky-looking, grainy stuff stuck under your fingernails after playing outside? That's dirt! But the ground you played on where it came from? That's soil! **Soil** is like a living, layered skin that covers the earth. It is a combination of minerals, air, water, animals and other living creatures that occupy an area, and even their waste products (that's right, poop!). When particles of soil are separated, like being stuck to the bottom for your shoe or under your fingernails, they become what we call "dirt." This easy experiment shows there's more to dirt than meets the eye!



You will need:

- a flat workspace you can get dirty, such as an outdoor table, a large cardboard box lid, or a covered table if indoors.
- a clear jar with a lid
- small shovel or spade for digging and pouring
- dirt (get this by digging up soil from your back yard. Remember, once it's dug up, it's not soil anymore, it's dirt! You will need enough to fill your jar until it's half full.)
- water
- magnifier and/or flashlight

1. Fill your jar halfway with dirt. Add water until it nearly reaches the top, with a little bit of space for air.
2. Secure your jar with its lid and give it a good shake, while you count to 60.
3. Set your jar down on your flat work space, and let the dirt settle. Since soil is made up of different layers and different types of particles, it will separate into layers. Some things may even float.
4. Observe. What can you see? How many layers can you count? Draw and label your observations on the recording page.

Quick Tip: Get Down and Dirtier! Want a neat (or, not so neat, literally) extension? Try sampling dirt from different locations, and do a side-by-side comparison!