

Soils

Animals need food. Plants also need food which we call nutrients. Plants get most of their nutrients from the soil. Healthy plants need healthy soil with lots of nutrients.

Soil is made from broken down pieces of rock, humus which comes from rotting plants and animals, water and air. Humus releases a lot of the nutrients held in plants back into the soil, it is a bit like nature's fertiliser. Soil air is very important because the roots of plants need oxygen. Holes and cracks in the soil are also very important to help water move through it.

The deeper the soil, the more nutrients there are for plants. Soil often forms layers like a cake. The top layer is called the topsoil and contains most of the nutrients. The bottom layer is called the sub-soil and often has a lot of clay. Beneath this layer we often find rock which is still breaking down.

Soil mini beasts such as worms are very important for healthy soil. They eat rotting plants and help return their nutrients back into the soil. They also make burrows which allow fresh air into the soil and water to soak into it. Fungi are also very important recyclers of dead plants and animals.

Plants protect the soil from erosion. This occurs when wind blows it away and water washes it away. It takes thousands of years for nature to make new soil and Australian soils are often very shallow. Our soils are not very deep so we can not afford to lose much by erosion or the plants and crops will not be healthy.

1. Plant food is called n _ _ _ _ _ . Plants get most of this from the s _ _ _ .

2. Name four things which soil is made of.

3. Dead plants and animals rotting in the soil become h _ _ _ _ .

4. The top layer of soil called _ _ _ _ _ . Why is this important?

5. Why are worms and fungi important?

6. The loss of soil by wind and water is called e _ _ _ _ _ .

7. Why can't we afford to lose much soil by erosion in Australia?

8. How can we protect soil from erosion?
