

SOIL FORMATION PROCESSES

MINERALISATION



- ↳ **Definition:** process where organic matter in the soil is broken down by microorganisms into mineral nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. *(Turnover: organic matter → inorganic)*
 - ↳ **Microorganisms:** Tiny organisms such as bacteria and fungi break the organic matter → simple mineral (inorganic) compounds.
 - ↳ **Nutrients:** Organic matter → converted to mineral nutrients + taken up by plants + growth and development.
- Decomposer (nitrates, phosphates & sulphates) - carbon, hydrogen + oxygen → inorganic - CO₂ & H₂O
- ↳ **Environmental requirements:** suitable temperature, humidity, and a pH balance favourable for the activity of microorganisms.
 - ↳ **Importance for Plants:** nutrient release - soil fertility + healthy plant growth.

HUMIFICATION



- ↳ **Definition:** transformation - plant + animal residues → humus
- ↳ **Organic matter deposition:** Dead plants, animals and microorganisms + into the soil, retaining organic matter in the upper layers of the soil.
- ↳ **Decomposition:** Microorganisms such as bacteria and fungi break down the organic matter by decomposition processes (① simple - sugars + starch; ② proteins + cellulose; ③ tannin)
- ↳ **Formation of humus:** decomposition → organic matter (breakdown of organic compounds) + humus + dark-coloured, rich substances (not easily decomposed)
- ↳ **Humification:** accumulation of humus in the soil bearing + improves soil fertility + 1 water retention and nutrients.
- ↳ **Depth distribution:** Humification occurs in the **topsoil**, which extends deep into the horizons of the soil.

LEACHING

- ↳ **Definition:** movement of soil particles through water passing through the soil (*freely - downward*)
- ↳ **Requirements for Leaching:** Presence of water that can pass through the soil - freely (e.g. rainfall or irrigation) + Soil structure - water permeability (sand - large pores)
- ↳ **Factors That Promote Leaching:**
 - Poor or no vegetation cover that promotes erosion.
 - Steep slopes that allow water to drain down quickly.
 - Loose soil structure that is easily moved by water.
- ↳ **Impacts of Leaching:**
 - Loss of fertile topsoil + plinthite formation.
 - Clogging of rivers and streams with mud.
 - Reduction in water quality & nutrients (metal ions+)
 - Dissolved materials - deep groundwater / surface water



PLINTHITE formation

- ↳ **Definition:** movement of the groundwater table up and down over the seasons → groundwater table rises during wet seasons and decreases during dry seasons (hot, humid drafts - tropical climate)
- ↳ **Influence:**
 - wet seasons + increase rainfall the groundwater table + deeper lying soil layers + water (waterlogged) + chemical changes [iron → ferri]
 - dry season - lower table [iron → ferri]
- ↳ **Formation of Plinth layers:** Repeated movements of the groundwater table + deposits of soil particles and minerals at different depths + plinth layers → succession of different soil textures and colours
- ↳ **Plinthite** - oxidized iron horizon + red colour (aluminium - + iron bands left behind after leaching of silicates from **surface soil**)
- ↳ **Leach** - silicate (silicon) + leached downwards - potassium, calcium + magnesium ions easily leached
- ↳ **Physical Properties of Soil** water retention, drainage, and air space between soil particles

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DP Hallahan



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