

# Where to Find Information Regarding Your Soil

Cathy McGuire, MLRA Soil Survey Leader, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Tucson

(Adapted from article originally written by Mike Collins, Wyoming NRCS)

**W**hat you grow, what you build and how you manage your land all depend on the soil. Soil is the main livelihood of plants and animals. It's also important to air quality, water quality, and the ability to support buildings and treat waste effluent in septic systems

## What is a Soil Survey?

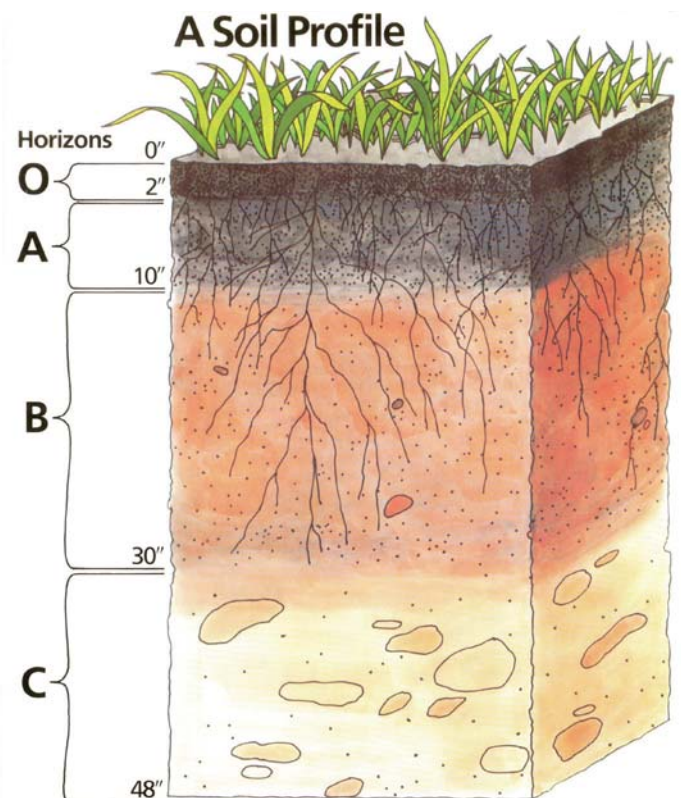
Soil surveys provide an orderly, on-the-ground, scientific inventory of soil resources. Soil surveys include maps showing the locations and extent of dominant soil types and data about the physical and chemical properties of those soils. The soil interpretations derived from that data describe the suitability and limitations associated with each kind of soil. Soil surveys provide basic information needed to manage the soil resource for long-term sustainability. They provide important information needed to manage water quality, wetlands, and wildlife habitat, and they are important to homeowners, city and county planners, engineers, zoning commissions, tax commissioners, developers, and agricultural producers.

## Where do I find SOILS information?

Typing "soils" in an Internet search engine will likely give you thousands of links to information. Unless you're a specialist in soils, sorting through this huge amount of information will take some time and effort.

Now, though, there is a new place for soils information — a one stop web site that has information for everyone from kindergarteners to professional soil scientists. The web site <http://soils.usda.gov> contains lesson plans and ideas, posters, links to professional societies, career planning information to become a soil scientist, and all of the references used by soil scientists including the *Field Book for Describing and Sampling Soils*, *Soil Survey Manual*, *Soil Survey Laboratory Methods Manual* and *Soil Taxonomy*.

But the most exciting part of the new web site is Web Soil Survey (<http://soils.usda.gov/survey>). At this site you can delineate an area of interest from anywhere in the United States, pull up a soils map of that area and then examine soil data and interpretations. The site has lots of directions and does not require any GIS specialized skills. This site



contains the latest certified soil information and eventually will replace paper soil surveys.

If the Web Soil Survey does not answer your soil questions or if you need help using the site, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service Office. The local office can direct you to soil information or provide a paper copy of published soil surveys. The Arizona NRCS web page ([www.az.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/soils](http://www.az.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/soils)) has locations of soil survey offices and field offices that can help you obtain the information that you need.