

Alternate Investigation: What Can You Infer from a Handful of Soil?

Questions: What can a simple handful of soil tell you about the environment? How does soil differ from place to place? Examine some soil samples to find out.

Safety Precautions

- Wear gloves if you handle the soil samples.
- Wash your hands after completing this lab.

Materials

- several samples of soil from different locations
- 2 petri dishes
- hand lens
- microscope (optional)

Procedure

1. Collect and label two small soil samples. Obtain one sample from a natural habitat, such as a forest or meadow. Obtain the other sample from a disturbed area, such as the side of a road or a playing field.
2. Put each sample in a separate petri dish. Use enough of each sample to cover the bottom of the petri dish.
3. Examine the soil with the hand lens or microscope. Look for living organisms and evidence of once-living organisms.
4. In a chart, use diagrams and words to record what you find in each soil sample. Include a description of the living or once-living organisms in each sample. If possible, count the number of different types of organisms in each sample. (You do not have to be able to name the type of plant or animal you find. Instead, you can just identify the different plants as Plant 1, Plant 2, and so on.)

