

Glossary

cast fossil A fossil that formed when a space left by a decayed plant or animal filled with minerals or grains of rock that turned into solid rock. A cast fossil is a copy of the organism that made a mold fossil.

clay soil The smallest pieces of rock found in soil. Clay soil feels silky or smooth when rubbed between the fingers.

compost A mixture of soil and decayed plant and animal material. Compost provides nutrients for plants. Many people make their own compost at home from kitchen scraps. Compost is used as fertilizer in the garden.

control Anything that is kept the same in an experiment. An experiment has many variables. All variables except one are kept the same. These are controls.

decomposer An organism that breaks down dead plant and animal matter. Soil contains many types of decomposers: earthworms, fungi, mold, insects, and bacteria. Without decomposers, waste would pile up and plants would run out of food.

erosion Happens when weathered rock or soil gets moved from one place to another. Erosion is caused by moving water, wind, and ice (glaciers).

experiment An investigation that tests an idea. In a fair experiment, factors that might affect the results—called variables—are controlled.

fossil The remains or traces of dead plants or animals preserved in rock. The oldest fossils are found in the deepest layers of rock. Fossils teach us about the history of Earth.

geologist A scientist who studies rocks to learn more about Earth. Geologists want to know what Earth is made of and how it formed. They study the forces that shape Earth's features. They also look for clues about the history of Earth.

gram A metric unit of mass. The gram is a unit of mass. But people often use it to describe how much something weighs.

hardness How hard a mineral is compared to other minerals. A scratch test shows the hardness of a mineral.

humus Dark material in soil, made of decayed plants. Decomposers help make humus. Humus provides the nutrients that plants need to grow.

loam A kind of rich soil that is good for growing most plants. Loam contains equal parts of humus, clay, and sand.

mass A measure of the amount of "stuff" in an object or substance. You have more mass than a book. A book has more mass than a paper clip. Objects with more mass also have more weight.

mineral A solid that is found in nature, was not made by anything alive, and is made of only one kind of material.

mold fossil A fossil that formed when a dead plant or animal trapped in mud decayed, leaving a space behind in the rock. All that is left in a mold fossil is an imprint of the organism. Sometimes mold fossils get filled with minerals. Those minerals become cast fossils.

property Something that can be observed about an object or substance. A property can be used to describe or sort objects.

rock Solid Earth material made of minerals.

Glossary (continued)

seed Something a plant makes that can grow into a new plant. A seed has a young plant, a supply of food for it, and a coat to protect it.

soil A mixture of weathered rock and decayed plants and animals. Plants need soil to grow. Soil is the top layer of Earth's land surface, in many places.

spring scale A tool used to measure mass and weight. Mass is measured in grams (g). Weight is measured in newtons (N).

variable Anything that can change in an experiment. In a fair experiment, only one variable is tested at a time. The test variable changes. The other variables are kept the same. Those are controls.

weathering The process of breaking down rocks into smaller pieces. Rocks weather when wind blows sand against them or when moving water makes them bump into other rocks.