

# What type of soil do you have?



BRITISH SOCIETY  
OF SOIL SCIENCE

## WHAT ARE SOILS MADE OF?

Soil is made up of a mixture of mineral (sand, silt, clay) and rotted plant (organic) material. Different soil types contain different amounts of each.

Soils with a large amount of sand particles form **SANDY SOILS** which form lightweight, free-draining soils, and don't hold on to water or nutrients.

Soils with lots of clay particles form **CLAYEY SOILS** which hold onto water well and can become waterlogged and heavy when wet.

Soils with lots of silt particles form **SILTY SOILS** which hold water.

**ORGANIC MATERIAL** in soils gradually accumulates from dead plant material and soil microbes. This releases nutrients which help the plants grow and also improves the structure and ability of the soil to hold water.

## WHAT ELSE IS IN THE SOIL?

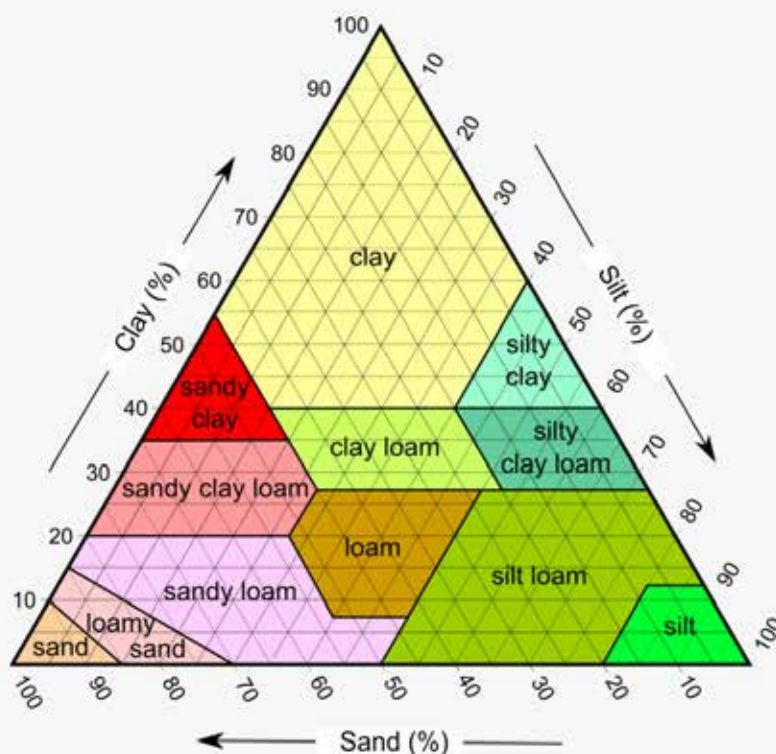
Soils also contain water and air. Just under half (about 30-40%) of soil is made up of water and air! Well structured soil contains more air-filled pores. Soils also contain animals, such as insects, bacteria and earthworms, and lots of fungi. These help to break down dead materials in the soil.

## HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT TYPE OF SOIL WE HAVE?

Soil Scientists use a standard soil texture triangle to decide which soil they have based on how much sand, silt and clay are in the soil.

The texture of a soil can influence its drainage - the ease with which water drains through it. Clay soils tend to be poorly drained. Position in the landscape also influences soil drainage. Soils in valley bottoms often have naturally high water tables regardless of their texture.

You can use the flow chart on the back of this sheet to help you decide what type of soil you have.



WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!



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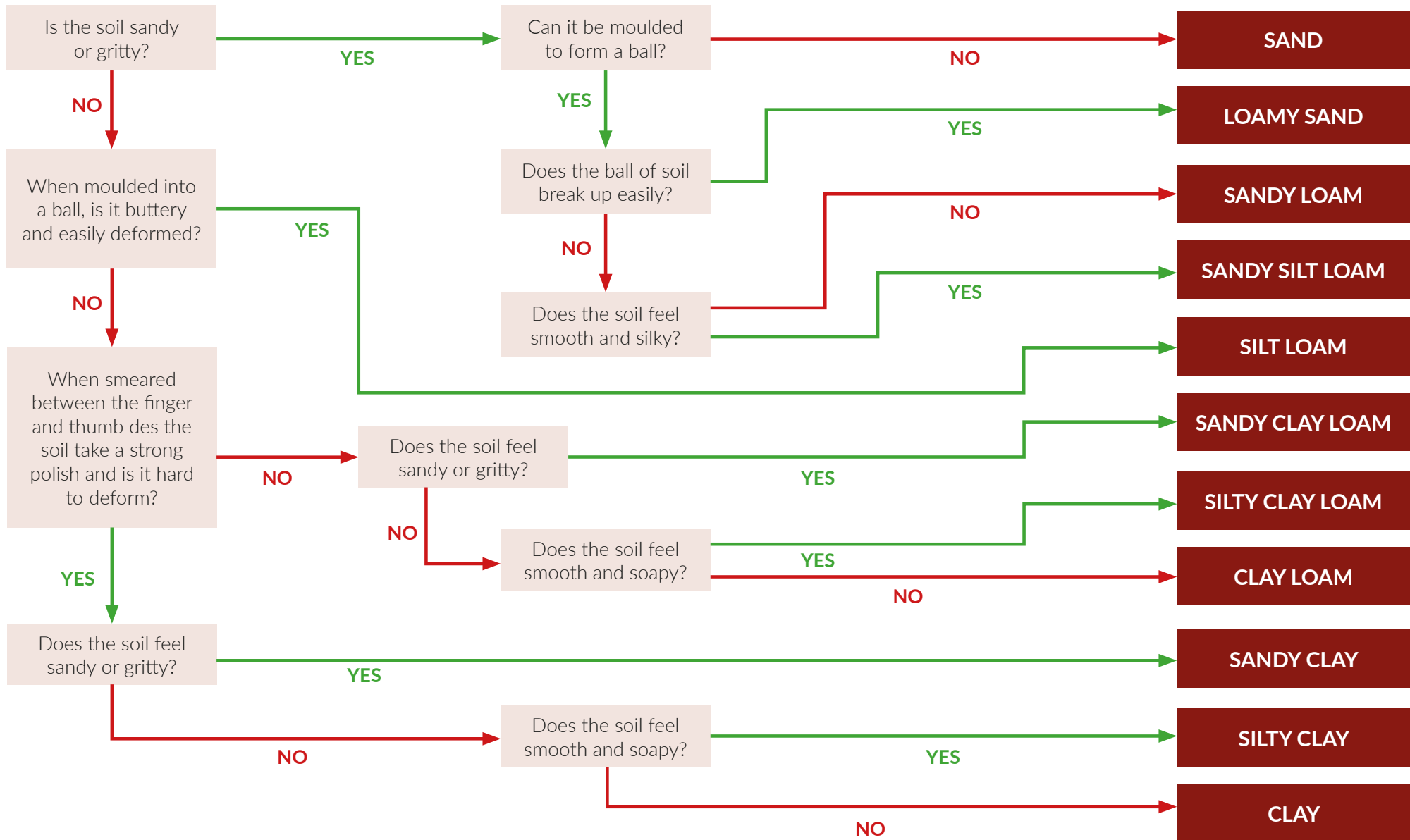


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# Take a small clump of moistened soil and knead it between your fingers, then follow the flow chart below to find out what type of soil you have...



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