

SOIL TEXTURE ANALYSIS “THE JAR TEST”

Factsheet | HGIC 1656 | **Updated:** Feb 11, 2019

Soil is a medium comprised of soil particles, organic matter, water, air and living organisms, all of which are important to the overall health of the soil and the plants that grow in it. The three primary soil particles are sand, silt, and clay. The relative percentages of these components present make up the soil's texture. Texture is important to overall soil and plant health as it relates to soil porosity, which refers to the pore spaces where air and water reside.

The ideal soil texture is a mix of sand, silt, and clay particles, known as a loam. In most cases the particles will not be balanced, and the soil will need to be altered by adding organic amendments. To evaluate soil texture, use a simple jar test to determine the percentages of sand silt, and clay. Once the percentages are calculated, the soil textural triangle can be used to determine the soil type.

Soil Texture Analysis “The Jar Test” Procedure

Materials:

- Straight edged, clear jar
- Permanent marker
- Ruler
- Watch or stop watch
- 1 tablespoon of powdered dishwashing detergent or liquid dish soap.
- Mesh sieve or old colander

Procedure:



Jar filled a $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way full with soil.

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1. Using a mesh sieve or old colander, sift the soil to remove any debris, rocks, and large organic matter (leaves, sticks, roots, etc.).
2. Fill the jar $\frac{1}{3}$ full of the soil to be tested



Jar filled with water, leaving space at top.
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3. Fill the remainder of the jar with clean water, but leave some space at the top.



Jar showing the coarse sand layer settled at the bottom of the jar.
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4. Add 1 tablespoon of powdered dishwashing detergent

5. Cap the jar and shake vigorously until the soil turns into a uniform slurry.

6. Set on a level surface and time for one minute.

7. Place a mark the outside of the jar, showing the coarse sand layer settled at the bottom of the jar.



Jar showing the silt layer.
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8. Leave the jar in a level spot for 2 hours.

9. Mark the top of the next settled layer with the permanent marker. This is the silt layer.



Jar showing the clay layer.
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10. Leave the jar on a level spot for 48 hours.

11. Mark the top of the next settled layer with the permanent marker. This is the clay layer that has settled on top of the silt layer.



Using a ruler, measure and record the height of each layer, and the total height of all three layers.
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12. Using a ruler, measure and record the height of each layer, and the total height of all three layers. Use the soil texture analysis worksheet below to record results.

Quadra Garden Club: After completing steps 1-12 above, fill in measurements section on the next page. Bring the completed worksheet OR the numbers for the % sand, % silt, and % clay with you to the session. We will review how to use the soil texture triangle during the in-person session.

Soil Texture Analysis “The Jar Test” Worksheet

Measurements

Height of sand layer _____ inches / cm

Height of silt layer _____ inches / cm

Height of clay layer _____ inches / cm

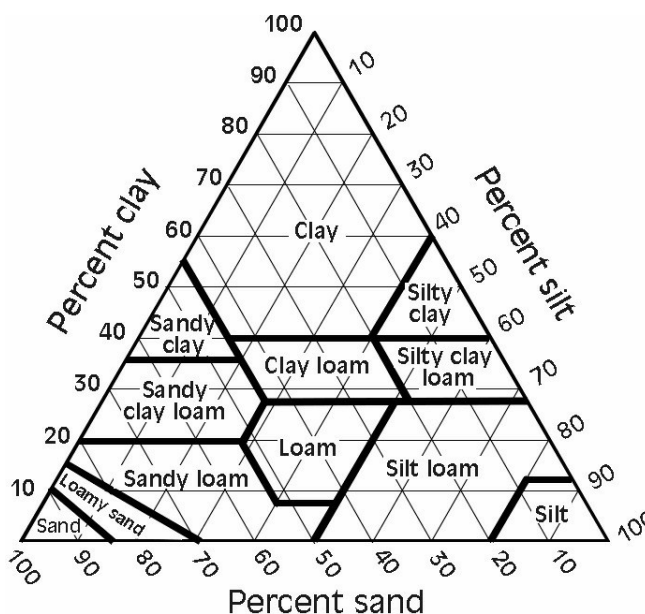
TOTAL HEIGHT OF LAYERS

_____ inches / cm

% SAND=(sand height)/(total height) x 100
= _____ % SAND

% SILT=(silt height)/(total height) x 100
= _____ % SILT

% CLAY=(clay height)/(total height) x 100
= _____ % SILT



Soil texture triangle to estimate the soil type for the site

If this document didn't answer your questions, please contact HGIC at hgic@clemson.edu or 1-888-656-9988.

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