



Science
Societies

Soil riddles: March 2026

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AI-generated image courtesy of ChatGPT.

Think you know soils? Test your knowledge in our new series, "Soil Riddles."

If you are the first to guess the correct soil series name and its geographical location, we'll publish your name along with the answer in an upcoming issue.

Soil Riddle 1

*Where the trade winds cease and the sun beats down,
At a point where the compass finds southernmost ground,
Coastal slopes of a shield volcano gave me birth,
Where lava meets ocean at the island's rough surf.*

*Basic volcanic ash fell from the sky,
Over rugged aa where the land meets high.
Olivine sand sparkles in my A1 and A2,
Green crystals from magma, a mineralogist's view.*

*My Bw/2C1 horizon shows structure so weak,
Prismatic and silty where calcium streaks.
Fragmental 2C2 lies beneath with barely a trace,
Of soil in the cobbles, carbonate's pale trace.*

*Then 2R arrives, bluerock massive and hard,
A lithic contact ending my yard.
Medial-skeletal I stand in the torric regime,*

Amorphic over mixed, an isohyperthermic dream.

A Typic Haplotorrant under skies ever dry,

Where evaporation exceeds rainfall supply.

Lantana and bermudagrass mark where I stay,

Near where ancient voyagers once found their way.

What is my series name, and where do I lie?

Last month's winners

Congratulations to **Alex Kalisz** and **MaryBeth Gavin**, who were the first to answer both riddles correctly for February 2026!

The correct answers for February were: the San Luis and Seitz soil series(es) in the San Luis Valley of Southern Colorado; Rio Grande County area.

Alex is a second-year Ph.D. student in pedology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW–Madison), studying the genesis and spectral properties of Andisols under Dr. Yakun Zhang. She is one of the coaches for the UW–Madison Soil Judging Team.

MaryBeth is a M.S. student studying Soil and Land Resources with Dr. Daniel Strawn at the University of Idaho (UI) where she investigates the efficacy of biochar amendments for selenium remediation for phosphate mine reclamation. Outside the lab, she co-coaches the UI Soil Judging Team, makes soil monoliths, and teaches soil science.



Alex Kalisz (left) and MaryBeth Gavin (right).

Soil Riddle 2

*High on a dormant giant's flank I rest,
Where thin air chills and altitude's the test.*

*Volcanic ash in layers deep,
Over aa clinkers where the lava sleeps.*

*No cinders here, don't be confused,
Pure ash deposits, not pyroclastics fused.*

*My A1 starts dark with organic stain,
Then 2A2 continues the mollic domain.*

*Lithologic breaks in numbered array,
2Bw1, 3Bw2, horizons on display.*

*Ashy textures, amorphous and light,
Hydrophobic when dry, repelling rain's might.*

*Ustic moisture beneath a cryic-like chill,
Isomesic temperatures on this windswept hill.*

*Mamane and pukiawe cling to my face,
Where scientists study the cosmos from this lofty place.*

*A Humic Ustivitrands my classification reads,
Volcanic glass serving my chemical needs.*

What is my series name, and on which slopes do I form?

Soil Riddle 3

*In a valley carved deep by ancient streams,
Where waterfalls cascade in misty dreams,
Alluvium from basalt settled the floor,
Building my profile forevermore.*

*Gleyed from the start, my Apg is dark,
Reduced conditions leave their waterlogged mark.*

*Ag1 and Ag2 continue the gray,
Where oxygen fled and iron washed away.*

*Bg1 and Bg2 hold redoximorphic stains,
Yellowish brown mottles from seasonal rains.*

*Then Cg at depth, the gray deepens still,
Very-fine clays from the volcanic hill.*

Poorly drained on bottomlands so flat,

A Typic Endoaquept is where I'm at.

*Mixed mineralogy, semiactive and fine,
Isohyperthermic in the tropical clime.*

Wetland paddies have shaped me for centuries long,

Where a starchy staple grows green and strong.

*Revered by the people who first tilled this ground,
In a valley where royalty's echoes resound.*

What is my series name, and which valley do I lie?

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