Science Societies

Soil riddles: May 2026

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AI-generated image courtesy of ChatGPT.

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

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

Amazing soils are all around us. We see some quite often while others only on special occasions or during a once in a lifetime trip. My wife, daughter, and I love to travel and have had the opportunity to visit some bizarrely interesting soils. My wife and I are both soil scientists and know very well how excited soil scientists get when trying to identify a soil from a photo or even just a partial core.

In that spirit, I thought it would be fun for some of you to test your soils knowledge. Each month, I will share a new riddle in *CSA News*. If you are the first to guess the correct **soil series name** and its **geographical location**, I will publish your name along with the answer in an upcoming issue. Email your answers to me at adaigh2@UNL.edu (send message) with the subject line "*Soil Riddles May 2026.*"

Soil Riddle 1

On mesas where volcanic rocks abound,

Basalt and colluvium shaped my ground.

Gravelly fine sandy loam starts my A,
Brown hues of 7.5YR on display.

My Bk horizon builds calcium's store,

Carbonate nodules scattered through my core.

Violently effervescent, the fizz runs deep,
Where twenty-five percent gravel fragments sleep.

Then Bkkm arrives, indurated and white,

A petrocalcic hardpan, cemented tight.

But wait, below the cycle repeats,
B'k and B'km in alternating sheets.

Hardpan, then soil, then hardpan again,

A layered fortress across the terrain.

At last 2R emerges, basalt dark and dense,
A lithic contact, my final defense.

Loamy and shallow, superactive I stand,

A Calcic Petrocalcid on this arid land.

Mesic temperatures, ustic-aridic regime,
Sagebrush and juniper complete the scene.

Where sandstone formations arch to frame the desert sky,

And red rock towers catch the visitor's eye,

I form on mesas the tourists pass,

Over volcanic rock, not sediment or glass.

Where views get fiery and gardens feel dark in this loop,
Enjoy the ‘360’ outlook of the Petrocalcid Great Group.

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

Last month's winners

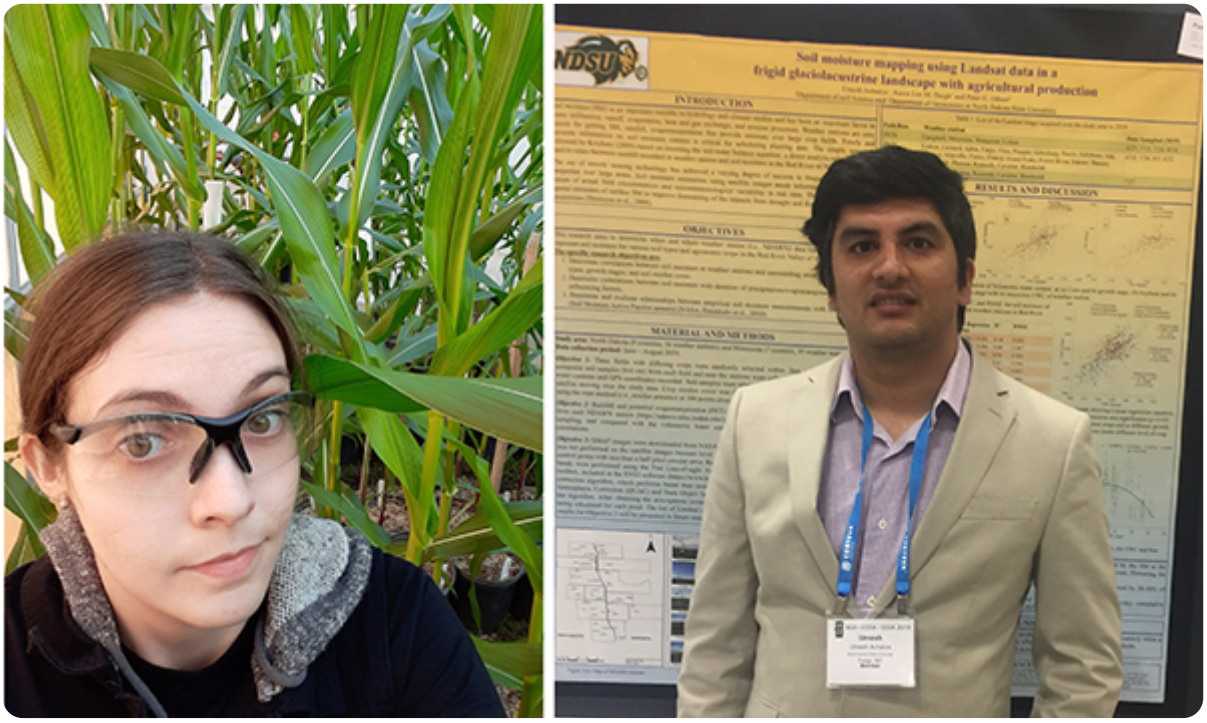
Congratulations to **Nikki Stehr** and **Umesh Acharya,** who were the first to answer both riddles correctly for April 2026!

All three soils were found just north of the Boston Mountains and within the Ozark Mountains near Fayetteville, AR. Riddle 1: Captina soil series. Riddle 2: Nixa soil series found near the Captina soil series on ridgetops and sideslopes. Riddle 3: Cherokee soil series found in depressional areas adjacent to the Captina and Nixa soil series.

Nikki has a background in agronomy and plant breeding and was on the winning team of the NACTA soil judging contest from the University of Wisconsin–River Falls in 2015.

Umesh is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. His research integrates machine learning, remote sensing, and field experiments to assess soil health, agroecosystem resilience, and the impacts of climate variability on crop production.

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Nikki Stehr and Umesh Acharya

Email answer(s)

More soil riddles

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