Science Societies

Soil riddles: September 2026

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

> If you are the first to guess the 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, here is a riddle (or two) for you!

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 September 2026."*

Good luck and have fun!

Soil Riddle 1

Redbed shales crumbled and washed to the floor,

Alluvium gathered where playas could store.

My A is reddish brown, calcareous clay,

Then Bss horizons mark vertic display.

Slickensides gleam where smectites have swelled,

Cracks more than a centimeter wide, year-round upheld.

Thirty-five to sixty percent clay defines my form,

A Chromic Haplotorrert through drought and through storm.

Very coarse prismatic parting to angular blocks,

Extremely hard when dry, very firm when wet unlocks.

Dig deep enough, beyond the Bss,

You will find sharp red residual to suddenly attest.

Tobosa and buffalograss where summer rains fall,

Blue grama and mesquite standing sparse and tall.

In a playa depression near a river named for a nation,

Just miles from a border at semiarid station.

Between two highways where the Panhandle sprawls,

My name recalls a county where New Mexico calls.

What is my series name, and in which state's playa do I lie?

Soil Riddle 2

Triassic and Permian redbeds weathered away,

Siltstone and sandstone and shale in the fray.

My parent alluvium washed to convex fans below,

Footslopes surrounding where playa waters flow.

My A horizons are reddish brown loam at the start,

Then Bw horizons show cambic art.

But deeper still the carbonates accrue,

A calcic Bk horizon where white masses grew.

Pinkish white nodules in reddish brown clay,

Ustic Haplocalcid, aridic display.

Fine-silty textures with mixed mineralogy,

Superactive clays mark my pedology.

I rim and unlay the playa where my cousin resides,

The vertic soil from Riddle 1 with slickensides.

We share a county name, mine as my own,

On fans surrounding the basin I've grown.

What is my series name?

Last month's winners

The answers to last month's (August 2026) riddles were "The Woodmont and Norene Soil Series on the Nashville Basin in Rutherford County, south of Nashville, TN." We had three winners this time! Congratulations to Amber Gunter, Nkem Nwosu, and Gregory Willoughby.

Amber Gunter is a graduate research and teaching assistant in the Department of Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science at the University of Tennessee. Her M.S. research with Dr. Sindhu Jagadamma explores physical, chemical, and biological

indicators of soil health across grazing and row crop systems on working farms in Southern Appalachia.

Nkem Nwosu is a Ph.D. candidate in Agronomy at the University of Florida's West Florida Research and Education Center (UF-WFREC). His research focuses on cover crops and nitrogen management to optimize yields, soil moisture, and soil health in cotton cropping systems. He also evaluates nutrient management strategies for optimizing fiber and seed production in industrial hemp.

Greg Willoughby, Ph.D., covers the North-Central U.S. as Technical Services Manager for Helena Agri-Enterprises, LLC. He oversees R&D in his region and provides agronomic training and support for the company's field agronomy and product manager and sales teams. He lives in Lafayette, IN and earned his Ph.D. at Purdue University but grew up north of Nashville in Scottsville, KY in karst area and went to Western Kentucky University as an undergraduate.

From left to right: Amber Gunter, Nkem Nwosu, and Greg Willoughby.

Email answer(s)

More soil riddles

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