DR. DIRT'S SOIL TESTS ANYONE CAN DO AT HOME · TEST 7 OF 11

The Smell Test

What does healthy soil smell like?



Time: 5 minutes | Kids and grown-ups together

You will need

- ☐ A handful of soil from a garden bed
- ☐ A handful from a bare or soggy spot
- ☐ A little water

Try it

1. If the soil is dry, sprinkle on a little water.
2. Hold each handful close and take a gentle sniff.
3. Find a word for each smell: sweet, earthy, sour, rotten, or nothing?

What it means

Sweet and earthy, like a forest after rain

Soil life is busy. That smell is **geosmin** (jee-OHZ-min), made by tiny thread-like bacteria in airy, healthy soil.

Sour or like rotten eggs

The soil is too wet and short of air. Life that doesn't need air has taken over.

Nothing at all

Dry, or low in life. Wet it and sniff again. Still nothing? It needs organic matter.

> **Fun fact:** Your nose can smell geosmin in tiny amounts. It's why the air smells so good when rain hits dry ground.

***Wonder**: Which handful smelled more alive?*

My result