



LIFE

UNDERGROUND

We often think of soil as merely “dirt,” a simple, nonliving substance to be stepped on or washed out of our clothes. Soil is actually a dynamic habitat full of crawling creatures, decomposing microorganisms, organic plant and animal material, and minerals. A single handful of fertile soil may be inhabited by millions of small invertebrates.

Soil has more biodiversity—diversity of life—than any other place on the planet. Each life form has a vital task. Larger organisms, such as earthworms, break down residue—anything from a fallen leaf to an animal carcass.

Bacteria, fungi, and other microscopic organisms convert this organic material into nutrients that plants use.

Though we cannot see these interactions, we depend on them to support life on Earth.

Note: Numbers of organisms are approximate and will vary with type and location of the soil.

