



# Driftless Prairies: Native Ecosystems

- [Home](#)
- [Our Journey](#)
- [Citizen Science](#)
- [Driftless Area History](#)
- [Management & Applied Science](#)
- [Bio Inventory](#)
- [Tools & Techniques](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [E-mail Us](#)

# The Dirt on Driftless Prairies

Lafayette County, which is where Driftless Prairies is located in Wisconsin, is in the Driftless Area. It was named this because the glaciers did not roll over it, leaving picturesque hills and valleys. Soils in the southern part of Wisconsin are different from other parts of Wisconsin, partially because of the lack of glacial drift and partially because it lies in a transition area where tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, and hardwood forests blended together.

Soil is formed from weathering and other eroding processes of parent material and windblown materials. The parent material is from the Ordovician period (490 million years ago) and consists mainly of Galena dolomite along with some Niagara dolomite and Maquoketa shale; the windblown material is mostly loess and covers the majority of the county.

Soils are classified with their own taxonomy much the same as all living organisms. Yes, soil is a living, breathing entity! Although a Russian scientist developed the soil classification system in the 1870s, it wasn't until the 1920s that the US accepted the principles under which these classifications are made. There are 6 categories of classification; they are as follows with the approximate number of units in each category:

12 Order

63 Suborder

319 Great Group

2,484 Subgroup

≈ 8,000 Family

## ≈ 19,000 Series

Driftless Prairies has 5 series of soils: Chaseburg, Dubuque, Gale, Palsgrove, and Stony & rocky land. Series are usually named after the places where they are located (towns, rivers, counties, etc.). I won't go through a description of each of these here as more information can be obtained from the following link of the Lafayette County Soil Survey. Below is a scan of the soil survey for Westmeath Lane with our general area outlined in red marker that shows the soil types.

When we excavated for our house building, I took the following picture of the soil horizons. There are 5 horizons designated by capital letters O, A, E, B, and C. O is the organic layer at the very top and is generally found in woods. So, if you look at this picture, you can clearly see the A horizon, B horizon, and C horizon. There could be an E horizon, but I certainly can't see it. A is the topsoil, B is the reddish band because it has accumulated iron and aluminum oxides, C is the area below these and can contain structural features of the parent materials.



For more information on Lafayette County soils, check out the Soil Survey, Lafayette County Wisconsin that the US Dept. of Ag Soil Conservation Service created.

If you want to keep learning about soil, this is an excellent

textbook:

The Nature and Properties of Soil by Nyle C. Brady and Ray R. Weil

Other excellent books are already listed in my [Soil and Chocolate Cake](#) blog.

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