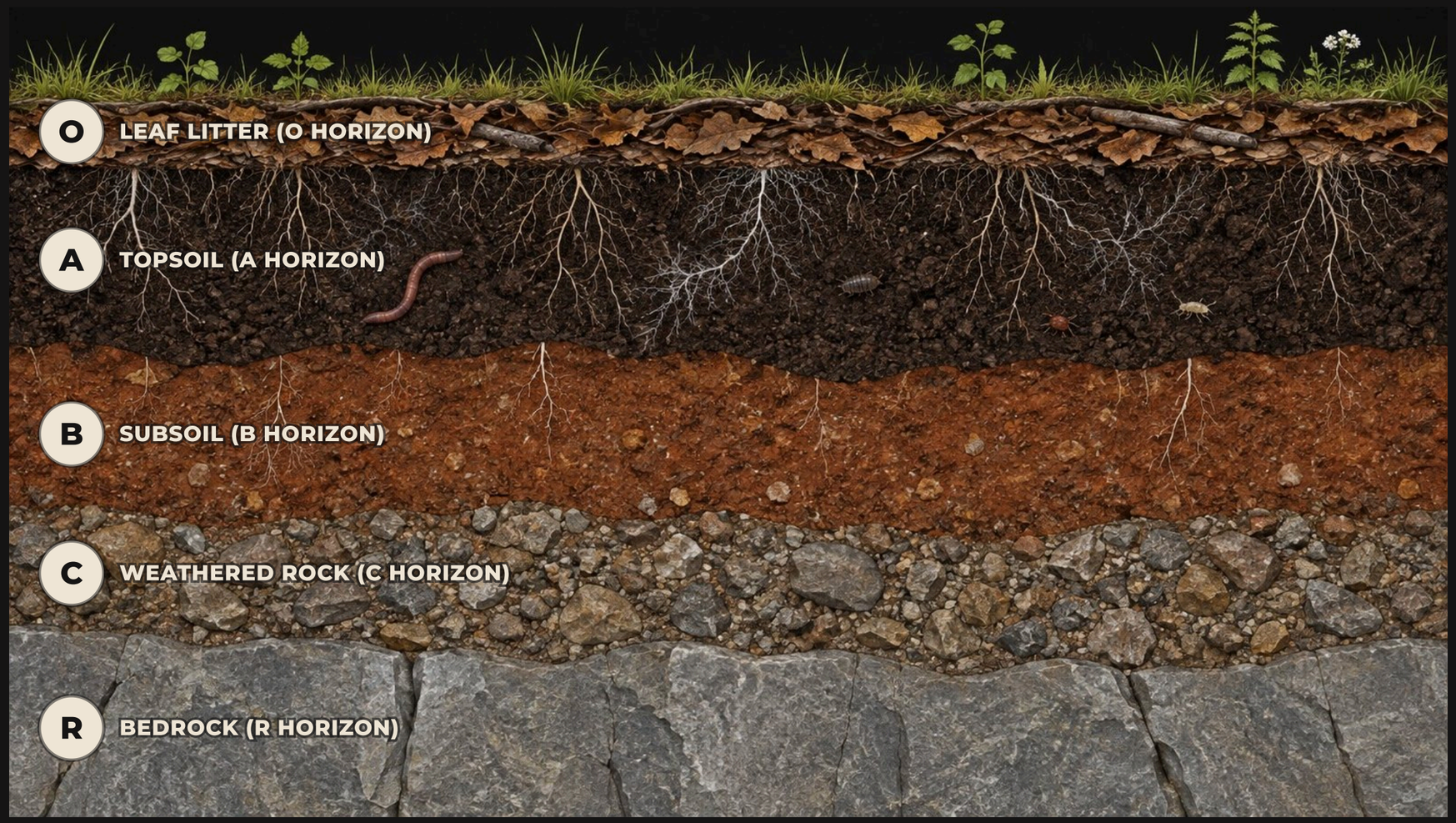
AQUARIAN ALCHEMY · THE EARTH ELEMENT

WHAT'S UNDER YOUR FEET: THE LAYERS OF LIVING SOIL

The ground is alive. Every layer depends on the ones above and below it.



O · LEAF LITTER
Fallen leaves and organic material on the surface, slowly breaking down.

A · TOPSOIL
Dark, rich and full of life. This is where most roots, fungi and soil organisms live, and where most food is grown.

B · SUBSOIL
Minerals washed down from above collect here. Deep roots reach into it for water and nutrients.

C · WEATHERED ROCK
Broken pieces of the rock below, slowly becoming soil.

R · BEDROCK
Solid rock, the original source of the minerals in soil and, through food, in you.

What is humus? The dark, stable organic matter that forms when plant and animal material decomposes. It holds water and nutrients like a sponge. [11]

Life underground: soil may be home to more than half of all species on Earth (59%, with a wide margin of uncertainty). [1] Food from the ground: about 95% of our food is produced directly or indirectly on soil. [2] Slow to form: 1 cm of soil can take more than 1,000 years. [2]

Illustrative, not to scale.

SOURCES

[1] Anthony, Bender & van der Heijden (2023), PNAS: soil biodiversity.
[2] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): soil and food production.
[11] Online Etymology Dictionary: “human,” “humus.”

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