

Organic matter

Organic matter (or **organic material**) is [matter](#) that has come from a recently living organism. It is capable of [decay](#), or is the product of decay; or is composed of [organic compounds](#). There is not one definition of organic matter only. It varies upon the [context](#), the subject it is being used for.

[Soil](#) is composed of [minerals](#) and organic matter, as well as living [organisms](#). The organic matter in soil comes from [plants](#) and [animals](#). In a [forest](#), for example, [leaf](#) litter and [woody](#) material falls to the forest floor. This is one kind organic material.^[1] When it decays to the point it is no longer recognizable it is called soil organic matter. When the organic matter has broken down into a stable humic substances that resist further decomposition it is called [humus](#).^[2]

Vitalism

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The equation of "organic" with living organisms comes from the now-abandoned idea of vitalism that attributed a special force to life that alone could create organic substances. This idea was first questioned after the abiotic synthesis of [urea](#) by Friedrich Wöhler in 1828.

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- [Biological tissue](#)

Footnotes

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1. [↑](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/organics/index.htm) <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/organics/index.htm>
2. [↑](#) Thus soil organic matter comprises all of the organic matter in the soil exclusive of the undecayed material (<http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/concepts/glossary.html> [Archived](#) 2006-11-08 at the [Wayback Machine](#)).

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