



**Table 1. Field characteristic of different soil textures** (adapted from McDonald et al. 1998).

Soil texture	Ribbon length	How the soil feels/behaves	Approx. clay content
Sand	nil	Coherence nil to very slight, cannot be moulded; sand grains adhere to fingers.	< 5%
Loamy sand	5 mm	Slight coherence; sand grains of medium size; can be sheared between thumb and forefinger.	5–10%
Clayey sand	5–15 mm	Slight coherence, sticky when wet, many sand grains stick to fingers, discolours fingers with clay.	5–10%
Sandy loam	15–25 mm	Coherent bolus but very sandy to the touch; dominant sand grains are of medium size and readily visible.	10–20%
Loam	about 25 mm	Loams can form a thick ribbon. Soil ball is easy to manipulate and has smooth spongy feel with no obvious sandiness. May be greasy to touch if much organic matter present.	about 25%
Silt loam	about 25 mm	Coherent bolus; very smooth to silky when manipulated.	About 25%
Sandy clay loam	25–40 mm	Strongly coherent bolus, sandy to touch; medium sand grains visible in a finer matrix.	20–30%
Clay loam	40–50 mm	Strongly coherent and plastic bolus, smooth to manipulate and slightly sticky.	30–35%
Silty clay loam	40–50 mm	Coherent smooth bolus; plastic and often silky to the touch.	30–35%
Sandy clay	50–75 mm	Plastic sticky bolus, fine to medium sand grains can be seen and felt.	35–40%
Light clay	50–75 mm	Plastic behaviour evident; smooth feel; easily worked, moulded and rolled into rod. Rod forms a ring without cracking.	35–40 %
Light medium clay	75–85 mm	Plastic bolus; smooth to touch; slight to moderate resistance to ribbon shearing.	40–45%
Medium clay	> 75 mm	Smooth plastic bolus; handles like plasticine; can be moulded into rods without cracking; resistant to shearing and sticks to thumb and forefinger.	45–55%
Heavy clay	> 75 mm	Smooth, very plastic bolus; firm resistance to shearing; will mould into rods. Handles like stiff plasticine. Very sticky and strongly coherent. Rods will form a ring without cracking.	over 50%

**Changing soil texture**

The texture of soil is considered to be a stable property. That is, changing the texture of your soil is possible but involves considerable mechanical and financial input. One example is clay delving, where clay from the subsoil is mixed with sandy surface soil. For most land managers, changing the texture of the soil is not a viable option for soil management. Texture often changes naturally with depth down the soil profile and it is important to know how the texture changes. Many of our soils have loamy surface soils and heavy clay subsoils. This arrangement controls the movement of water through the profile as the clay restricts downward drainage and can result in waterlogging of the surface soil, even though the subsoil may not be saturated.

**Reference**

McDonald RC, Isbell RF, Speight JG, Walker J, Hopkins MS (1998) 'Australian Soil and Land Survey Field Handbook' (Australian Collaborative Land Evaluation program: Canberra).

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