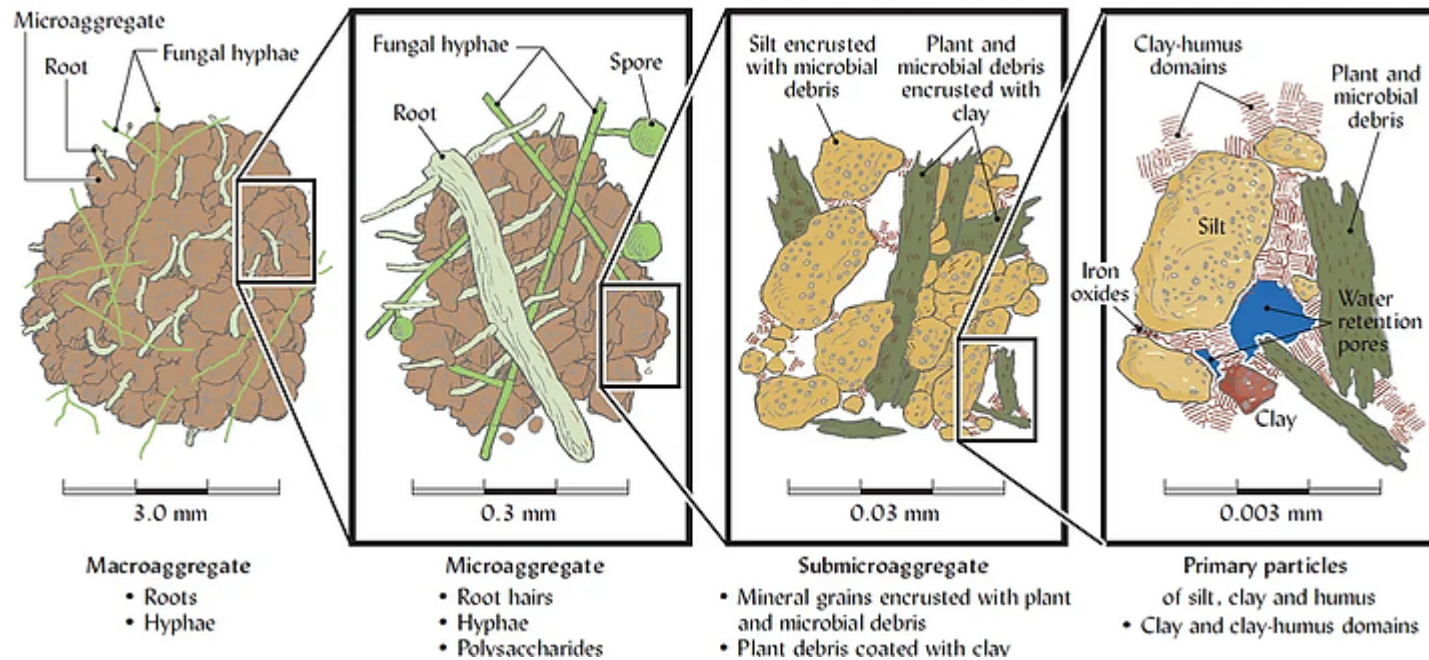




Dario Aug 9 3 min read

A good soil, a good life

I've never really understood holidays. The concept just escapes me. Why would one keep all the work to one side of the year and all the fun to the other? Week ends are no different. Why should I work hard all week and then try to compress all the fun over the remaining 2 days? And don't get me started on friends/family-work balance. Should I spend the best part of most of my days away from the people that I claim are the most important to me? Surely this is not how life works.



Look at a small lump of good, fertile, healthy soil. It contains clay, sand, silt, salts and other mineral compounds, labile and stable organic matter (including humus). It contains roots, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, worms, and billions of other creatures. It contains air and water. All these components are not split up in compartments. You don't see all the clay on one side and the sand on the other; the humus is not all at the top and the minerals at the bottom. In fact, if you had all the water on one side and all the air on the other that would be a disaster!

Good soil is characterised by a heterogeneous, complex, dynamic mix - in which every micrometer and every microsecond look different. That's what keeps the water and air exchangeable, available for plants and microbes. That's what allows bacteria to hide from nematodes and nematodes from fungi. That's what gives it stability. That's what makes it a good home for living things. That's what makes it whole.

If you were to magnify a small lump of healthy soil, it would look more and more diverse, its patterns richer and richer, labyrinthic - the more you zoom in, the more features you see. Large aggregates are made up of smaller and smaller aggregates. Half of the space is taken up by air and water, but these are found in minuscule pores, scattered around a complex and intricate matrix, held together by bacterial and fungal glues, as well as invisible intermolecular, electrostatic forces.

Even at the microscopic scale there is diversity and complexity. Humus-clay domains are the foundation of healthy soil structure. Even at the molecular nano-scale, compounds are varied and irregularly mixed; their interactions and vibrations are harnessed by living creatures, which convert the energy from cascading electrons into superbly organised structures and behaviours.

That's what great soil looks like. And I might be wrong, but to me, that's what a great life looks like. Work, rest, fun and learning are not relegated to different parts of the year. No day of the week is more suitable for learning than any other, and no time of the day is more appropriate for fun than any other. There's an opportunity for fun in every day, every hour, every single task. Every single breath. Ideally, I wouldn't be able to tell whether I'm playing or working, learning or recharging. At any time. I am privileged enough to experience this quite often, and for this I am immensely grateful.

While growing up, lots of people advised me to keep my passions from becoming a job, because money and commitment take away all the fun. Others recommended that I find a job I love doing, so that I would spend 8 hours a day doing what I like.

I am glad I didn't listen to either of those (undoubtedly well-meaning) pieces of advice. I am glad I didn't quite fully understand why one should separate work, play, rest and learning.

Despite the difficulties, I am glad I still don't quite get it. Living in a world made of workdays and holidays has always felt like being a fungal hypha in a lump of soil made up of dry, compacted clay. Although I often feel as part of a minority, the Earth is actually covered (perhaps just peppered, who knows) in people like me, who don't get it. I salute you, my siblings and friends. May our lives be like healthy soil. Diverse, Complex, Rich, Resilient, Dynamic. May every week, day,

hour, activity - may every breath be home to the greatest fun, the most meaningful work, the most regenerating rest, the most stimulating learning. And if society feels all but designed for us, may we be gently radical like the roots of the weeds that grow in the most impervious clay. May we be fiercely relentless, like the rise and spread of those ecological pioneers. May we be loved and loving despite being right, and happy and relaxed despite being wrong. May we be able to let go and take everything in, here and now.



