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Soil Life Scorecard

Two simple checks that show whether your soil is alive

*Made by **Serge (MSc)**, environmental scientist who measured soil respiration in the field. Scoring scales from USDA NRCS.*

Test on a fair day. Soil life slows down when soil is cold, dry or waterlogged. Test when the soil is moist, a day or two after rain, in spring or fall. Compare spots on the same day, and write down the soil temperature each time.

Check 1: Look and Smell

1. Dig one spadeful, 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 in) deep.
2. Lay it on a pale sheet and break it open.
3. Score each sign Low, Medium or High.

Sign	Low	Medium	High
Smell	Sour, swampy	Little or none	Fresh, earthy
Visible life	Few bugs, worms, fungal threads	Some	Many, varied
Old plant bits	None, or not breaking down	Some undecomposed	Many stages of breakdown

Check 2: Earthworm Count

1. Dig a block 30 × 30 cm (1 × 1 ft), 30 cm (12 in) deep.
2. Sort the soil on a pale sheet and count the worms.
3. Do 3 spots per area and average them. Put the worms back.

Worms	Signs	Rating
0 to 1	No holes or casts	Low
2 to 10	A few holes or casts	Medium
10 or more	Lots of casts and holes	Good

Sandy soils and dry regions can be healthy with few worms. Worms rarely thrive below pH 5.

Your Scorecard

Date	Spot	Soil temp	Moisture	Smell	Visible life	Old bits	Worm 1	Worm 2	Worm 3	Avg	Notes

Low scores? First re-test on a moist, mild day. If they are still low, the usual causes are compaction, little organic matter, very sandy soil or recent digging.
Tip: keep one spot you never dig as your reference. Differences between spots tested the same day tell you far more than any single score.

Want a number you can track year to year? The full **Soil Life Check** guide adds three more methods (cotton strip test, tea bag test and CO_2 burst kit), how to run a fair comparison, and seven fillable logs. **Get the Soil Life Check guide**.

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