

Soil Your Undies Challenge

How does it work?

Simply bury a pair of 100% cotton underwear around June and dig it back up after at least 60 days. It's a fun, visual way to see how active your soil's microbes are. The more the underwear decomposes, the healthier your soil!

What's happening Beneath the Surface

Healthy soil is alive — literally. One teaspoon of good soil can contain more microbes than there are people on Earth. These tiny organisms:

- Break down organic matter (like cotton!)
- Improve soil structure and water retention
- Cycle nutrients
- Help prevent erosion

The less fabric that remains after 60 days, the more active your soil life is.

If your undies look brand new, your microbes may be hungry.

Step-by-Step

- Take a before picture of the undies before you plant them
- Plant your undies.
 - Choose a spot in your field. Slice into the soil about a foot deep, slide the underwear in flat (no one likes bunched undies), and leave the elastic waistband slightly above ground.
- Wait 60 days.
 - Give your microbes time to do their work. If conditions are dry, add a little non-treated water (chlorine kills microbes).
- Dig them up and share your results!
 - Take a before and after photo, then share your location and a short description of your site (e.g., corn field, with or without cover crops, no-till vs strip-till).
- Send your photos to tdesmond@ilcorn.org or via text 309-287-5131 so we can feature Illinois soils across the state!