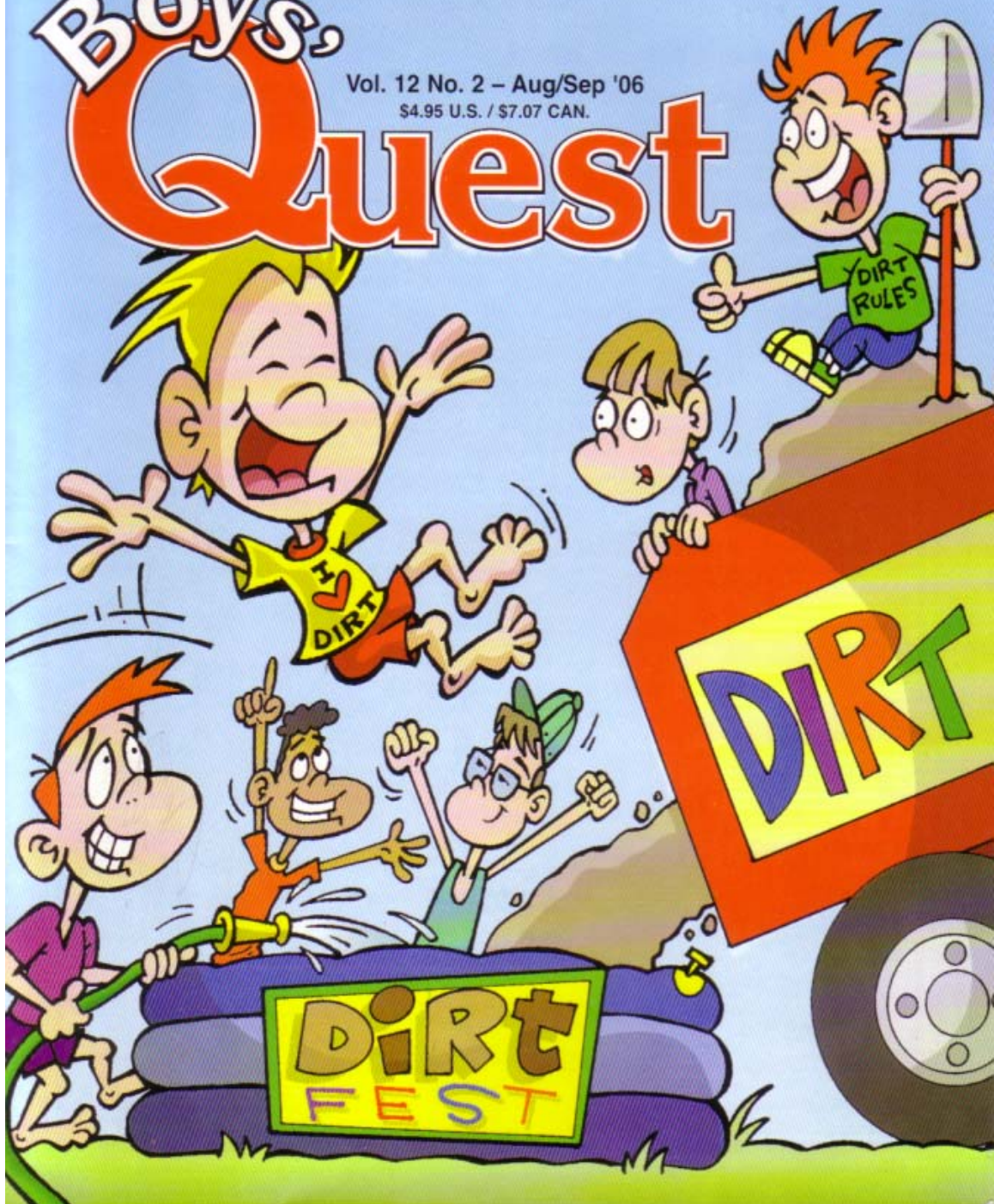


# Boys, Quest

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# A RECIPE FOR DIRT

by Michelle M. Barone

What do you see on the ground in your yard, in the park, and on the playground? It's the loose covering all over the earth where plants grow. It takes thousands of years for two or three feet of soil to form in nature. Here's a recipe for you to make your own dirt in just a short time.

## You will need:

- rocks
- paper
- old towel or rag
- safety goggles or glasses
- hammer
- container
- leaves
- grass
- water
- lettuce
- dead bugs and plants

## What to do:

1. Collect 15 walnut to egg sized rocks.
2. Place white paper on top of a table or the floor.
3. Rub two rocks together at the rough spots over the paper to make sandy dust. (Take care not to skin your knuckles.) Rock powder like this is part of dirt. What things in nature do you think cause rocks to turn to powder? Did you guess wind, rain, hail, heat, and freezing? Weathering beats, cracks, breaks, and rubs rocks to create rock dust.
4. Next, wrap one or two of your rocks in an old rag or towel. Put on safety goggles or glasses to protect your eyes in case a rock chip flies up. Use a hammer to crush your rocks into gravel and sand.



Weathering does this to rocks in the natural world. Erosion or wearing away by glaciers, waves, and storms also breaks rocks into fragments.

5. Put your rock dust, gravel, and sand into a container. Mix in two handfuls of grass, leaves, lettuce, plants, and dead bugs. This organic matter will break down or rot. It will make humus, or the rich part of dirt.

6. Add enough water to moisten your mixture.

7. Leave the container in a window sill or another sunny spot for six weeks, stirring occasionally. Add water once a week or when your mixture looks dry.

8. Plant bean or flower seeds in your dirt.

Soil is 45%, or about half, minerals which come from eroded or weathered rocks. One fourth, or 25% is water, one fourth or 25% is air, and 5% is organic matter like your leaves, grass, dead bugs, and plants.

What do you think would happen to your soil if you added bits of plastic, paint, or chemicals? Would your seeds grow?

Healthy soil is needed to grow the plant food for animals and people. Because it takes many years for soil to form, we all must take care of Earth's soil. Kids can help by throwing trash in garbage cans instead of on the ground. You can also pick up trash around lakes, rivers, and parks.

Making soil isn't really a dirty job. Nature has always been doing it. You've had a chance to make a little dirt of your own. We don't need to make dirt for the Earth, but we do need to help it stay clean. Now you know the "dirt" on soil!

