



Standard Practice for Estimating the Degree of Humification of Peat and Other Organic Soils (Visual/Manual Method)¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation D5715; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ϵ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope*

1.1 This practice covers the visual determination of the degree of humification of peat and other highly organic soils. This practice is not used for the determination of the degree of organic decomposition of organic matter in mineral soils.

1.2 *This practice offers a set of instructions for performing one or more specific operations. This document cannot replace education or experience and should be used in conjunction with professional judgment. Not all aspects of this practice may be applicable in all circumstances. This ASTM standard is not intended to represent or replace the standard of care by which the adequacy of a given professional service must be judged, nor should this document be applied without consideration of a project's many unique aspects. The word "Standard" in the title of this document means only that the document has been approved through the ASTM consensus process.*

1.3 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*²

[D653 Terminology Relating to Soil, Rock, and Contained Fluids](#)

[D2944 Practice of Sampling Processed Peat Materials](#)

[D2974 Test Methods for Moisture, Ash, and Organic Matter of Peat and Other Organic Soils](#)

[D4427 Classification of Peat Samples by Laboratory Testing](#)

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

¹ This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee D18 on Soil and Rock and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee D18.22 on Soil as a Medium for Plant Growth.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

3.1.1 For definitions of common technical terms in this practice, refer to Terminology [D653](#).

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *degree of humification*—as defined by this practice, degree of humification refers to any one of ten categories (indicated by the letter "H"), with H1 being the least decomposed and H10 being the most decomposed. This terminology actually refers to the present visual composition of the peat and highly organic soils.

3.2.2 *organic soils*—soil with a high content of carbon-based compounds. In general, organic soils are very compressible and have poor load sustaining properties.

3.2.3 *peat*—a naturally-occurring highly organic substance derived primarily from plant materials. Peat is distinguished from other organic soil materials by its lower ash content (less than 25 % ash by dry mass—see Practice [D2974](#)) and from other phytogenic material of higher rank (that is, lignite coal) by its lower calorific value on a water saturated basis.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 The purpose of this practice is to standardize the routine description of peat and other organic soils for various uses (such as, peatland inventories and resource evaluations). This practice should be used to supplement other field information, such as, site location, surface morphology, surface vegetation, water table, moisture content, fiber content, wood content, and visually identifiable plant types and parts.

NOTE 1—This standard is a visual/manual method and is not meant to replace the more precise method of laboratory classification of peat (see Classification [D4427](#)). It should also be noted, this practice is independent of the determination of whether a particular deposit contains peat that is defined in Classification [D4427](#) on the basis of laboratory determination of ash content (see Test Method [D2974](#)).

5. Sample

5.1 The sample used for this practice can be collected using piston coring devices or simply as a grab sample (that is, by hand) or a block sample by any of a number of means as long as it still retains its original in-situ composition (that is, moisture as well as solid components).

NOTE 2—In practice, the sample is collected using a field reconnaissance peat sampler; but it may be collected by a more sophisticated piston sampler.

*A Summary of Changes section appears at the end of this standard