



# Meet the Scientist!



A soil ecologist studies how soils interact with the organisms that live in and on them.

**Melanie K. Taylor**  
Soil Ecologist  
M.S., University of Georgia  
USDA Forest Service scientist



<http://www.naturalinquirer.org>

### Important Scientist Characteristics

A willingness to get dirty certainly helps in the field of soil ecology! Additionally, creativity in asking and answering scientific questions, and having great mentors, have been extremely helpful.

### Example of a simple research question I have tried to answer:

How do symbiotic fungi affect the amount of carbon stored in soils? Symbiotic organisms, such as the fungi in our research question, live closely with other organisms. One or more organisms can benefit from the symbiotic relationship.

### Technology or equipment used in research:

An infrared gas analyzer (IRGA) detects the amount of carbon dioxide in a gas sample. I use an IRGA to determine the amount of carbon dioxide being released from soils.

### Most Exciting Discovery

The type of symbiotic fungi sometimes found with tree roots helps explain the amount of carbon which is stored in the soils around the trees. Soil stores a huge amount of carbon, so this finding helps us account for all of the carbon!

### When did you know you wanted to be a scientist?

I knew I wanted to study science since I was a teenager. I grew up near an abandoned farm. Seeing part of the land change from farm to forest left me with many questions.

<http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/forestdisturbance/>