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# Terminology of Humus materials

**Humus** is the product of the decay of organic matter. It contains both humic and nonhumic material.

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**Humic acids** (plural) is the collective name for the acid radicals found in humic matter. They may be separated from humic matter by alkaline extraction.

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**Humic acid** (singular) is the acid radical found in humic matter which is soluble in alkali but insoluble in acid, methyl ethyl ketone, and methyl alcohol.

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**Humates** are the salts of humic acids, collectively, or the salts of humic acid specifically. (The usage must be determined from the context.)

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**Fulvic acid** is the acid radical found in humic matter which is soluble in alkali, acid, methyl ethyl ketone, and methyl alcohol.

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**Fulvates** are the salts of fulvic acid.

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**Humic** is the alkali-insoluble fraction of leonardite. (The usage of this term does not correspond exactly with the usage by other workers.) There is also another fraction typically less often known and it is called **Ulmic acid** and it fits in between humic acid (singular) and fulvic acid. Our fractions are actually based upon molecular weights rather than solubilities in acid or alkaline solutions. Our humic acid has molecular weight of 1500-3500 with the fulvic acid fraction having the lowest molecular weight of around 300 and then ulmic acid fits in between with weights in the 800 – 1400 range. It is only humates with molecular weights below 5000 that have benefits in agriculture and the smaller the better.

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**Leonardite** is a soft brown coal-like deposit usually found in conjunction with deposits of lignite.

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**Lignite** is a type of soft coal.

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