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ChemMatters (ISSN 0736-4687) is published four times per year (Oct/Nov, Dec/Jan, Feb/March, and April/May) by the American Chemical Society at 1155 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036-4800. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **ChemMatters** Magazine, ACS Office of Society Services, 1155 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. Subscription to **ChemMatters** is a membership benefit of the American Association of Chemistry Teachers (AACT). More information at: www.teachchemistry.org.

Subscriber Information
Prices in the United States, Canada, and Mexico: \$16 per subscription. For more information, please contact ACS Member Services, P.O. Box 182426, Columbus, OH 43218-2426; tel.: 1-800-333-9511; fax: 1-614-447-3671. Information is also available online at: www.acs.org/chemmatters.

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American Chemical Society
Canadian GST Reg. No. 127571347
Printed in the USA



Infographic Contest Winner

PETRICHOR

The Smell of Rain

The word petrichor sounds like an answer you would need to finish a crossword puzzle. What would the clue be? Maybe "The perfume of a rainy day." **Michelle Prunier** from *Guilford High School in Guilford Center, N.Y.*, created this month's winning infographic to teach us more about the chemistry of petrichor, the smell that greets us as we step out, umbrella in hand, into a rainy day.

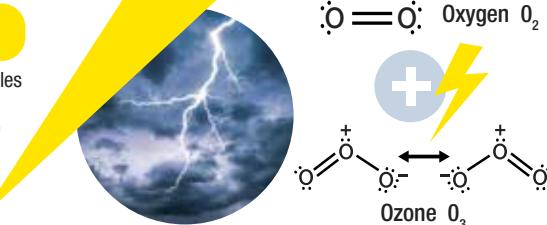
What Is Petrichor?

The term petrichor was coined by Australian scientists in 1964 to describe the unique, earthy smell associated with rain. It is caused by rainwater falling on dry soil, along with certain compounds like ozone, geosmin, and plant oils.

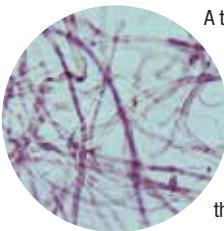
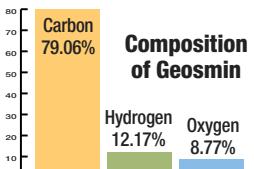


Ozone & Lightning

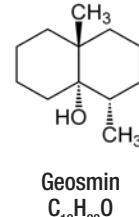
During a lightning strike, diatomic molecules of oxygen and nitrogen (containing two atoms) are split and re-arranged to create nitric oxide (NO) and ozone (O_3). Ozone molecules are carried down by raindrops to contribute to the scent.



Geosmin

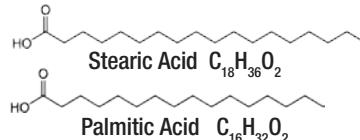


A type of bacteria found in soil, known as actinomycetes, secrete a compound called geosmin, which is released from soil into the air by raindrops. The human nose can detect geosmin in the air at less than five parts per trillion.

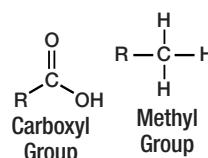


Volatile Plant Oils

During dry weather, plants produce compounds that accumulate between rocks and in soil. When it rains, these compounds, called volatile plant oils, are released into the air to add to the earthy smell of petrichor.



Stearic acid and palmitic acid are two such compounds. They are fatty acids—long hydrocarbon chains with a carboxyl group on one end and a methyl group on the other end.



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK

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