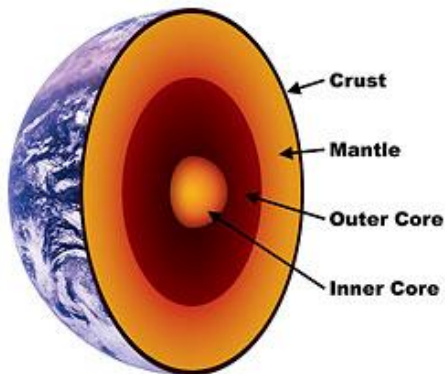


Layers of the Earth

The Four Layers

The earth is composed of four different layers. Many geologists believe that as the Earth cooled the heavier, denser materials sank to the center and the lighter materials rose to the top. Because of this, the crust is made of the lightest materials (rock - basalts and granites) and the core consists of heavy metals (nickel and iron).

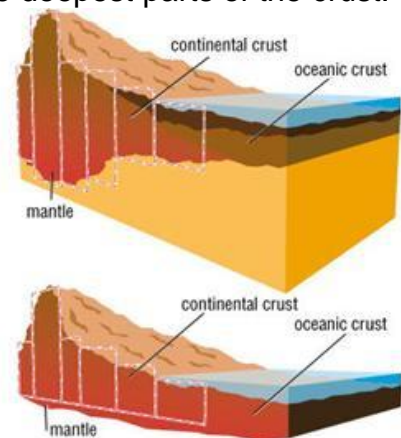


The crust is the layer that you live on, and it is the most widely studied and understood. The mantle is much hotter and has the ability to flow. The Outer and Inner Cores are hotter still with pressures to great that you would be squeezed into a ball smaller than a marble if you were able to go to the center of the Earth.

The Crust

The Earth's Crust is like the skin of an apple. It is very thin in comparison to the other three layers. The crust is only about 3-5 miles (8 kilometers) thick under the oceans (oceanic crust) and about 25 miles (32 kilometers) thick under the continents (continental crust). The temperatures of the crust vary from air temperature on top to about 1600 degrees Fahrenheit (870 degrees Celsius) in the deepest parts of the crust. You can bake a loaf of bread in your oven at 350 degrees Fahrenheit, at 1600 degrees F, rocks begin to melt.

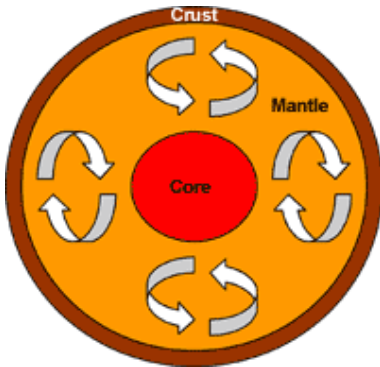
The crust of the Earth is broken into many pieces called plates. The plates "float" on the soft, plastic mantle which is located below the crust. These plates usually move along smoothly but sometimes they stick and build up pressure. The pressure builds and the rock bends until it snaps. When this occurs an Earthquake is the result.



Notice how thin the crust of the Earth is in comparison to the other layers. The seven continents and ocean plates basically float across the mantle which is composed of much hotter and denser material.

The Mantle

The mantle is the layer located under the crust. It is the largest layer of the Earth, 1800 miles thick. The mantle is composed of very hot, dense rock. This layer of rock moves using convection currents. The mantle that is closer to the core heats up faster and rises. After it rises, it then cools and sinks back down. This flow is due to great temperature differences from the bottom to the top of the mantle. The movement of the mantle is the reason that the plates of the Earth move. The temperature of the mantle varies from 1600 degrees Fahrenheit at the top to about 4000 degrees Fahrenheit near the bottom.



Outer Core

The core of the Earth is like a ball of very hot metals (4000 degrees F to 9000 degrees F). The outer core is so hot that the metals in it are all in the liquid state. The outer core is located about 1800 miles beneath the crust and is about 1400 miles thick. The outer core is composed of the melted metals nickel and iron.

Inner Core

The inner core of the Earth has temperatures and pressures so great that the metals are squeezed together and are not able to move about like a liquid, but are forced to vibrate in place as a solid. The inner core begins about 4000 miles beneath the crust and is about 800 miles thick. The temperatures may reach 9000 degrees F and the pressures are 45,000,000 pounds per square inch. This is 3,000,000 times the air pressure on you at sea level.

