






pedon: A Python package for analyzing unsaturated soil hydraulic properties

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Summary

pedon is a Python package for describing and analyzing unsaturated soil hydraulic properties. It provides an object-oriented framework for soil hydraulic models, along with tools for retrieving parameters from soil parameter databases, applying pedotransfer functions, and fitting soil hydraulic model parameters to measurements.

Statement of need

Researchers and engineers working with unsaturated soils need estimates of soil hydraulic model parameters for groundwater models. pedon provides a Python toolkit that brings together soil hydraulic models, parameter databases, pedotransfer functions, and fitting routines, making soil analysis faster, more reproducible, and easier to integrate into existing groundwater modeling workflows.

Soil hydraulic models

A soil hydraulic model (or soil model for short) is a parametric description of soil hydraulic functions: the soil water retention curve (SWRC) and the unsaturated hydraulic conductivity function (HCF). These relate soil water content and flow to pressure head and vice versa for use in variably saturated groundwater flow models. At this time, pedon provides the following soil models:

- pedon.Genuchten: Mualem (1976) - van Genuchten (1980)
- pedon.Brooks: Brooks & Corey (1964)
- pedon.Gardner: Gardner (1958) HCF with a Kozeny (1927) based SWRC (Bakker & Nieber, 2009; Brutsaert, 1967; Mathias & Butler, 2006)
- pedon.Campbell: Campbell (1974)
- pedon.Haverkamp: Haverkamp et al. (1977)
- pedon.Kosugi: Kosugi (1996)
- pedon.Fredlund: Fredlund & Xing (1994)
- pedon.Brunswick: Weber et al. (2019); Weber et al. (2020)
- pedon.Kool: hysteresis model with Mualem-van Genuchten SWRC and HCF (Kool & Parker, 1987)
- pedon.Gerke: dual-porosity model with Mualem-van Genuchten SWRC and HCF (Gerke & van Genuchten, 1993)
- pedon.Rucker: van Genuchten-like SWRC and Gardner HCF (Rucker et al., 2005)

- pedon.GenuchtenGardner: van Genuchten SWRC and Gardner HCF ([Gardner, 1958](#); [van Genuchten, 1980](#))
- pedon.Panday: van Genuchten SWRC and Brooks-Corey HCF ([Fuentes et al., 1992](#); [Panday, 2026](#))

Software design

The soil models are implemented as Python classes with model-specific methods for evaluating the SWRC and HCF. For example, the Mualem–van Genuchten soil model can be used as follows:

```
# Mualem-van Genuchten parameters for Sandy Loam
mg = pe.Genuchten(
    k_s=106.1, # saturated conductivity (cm/d)
    theta_r=0.065, # residual water content (-)
    theta_s=0.41, # saturated water content (-)
    alpha=0.075, # shape parameter (1/cm)
    n=1.89, # shape parameter (-)
)

h = np.logspace(-1, 6, 8) # pressure head (cm)
theta = mg.theta(h) # water content (-) at pressure head values
k = mg.k(h) # hydraulic conductivity (cm/d) at pressure head values
```

The object-oriented design and duck typing (relying on object methods rather than explicit types) provide a clear and consistent structure in which users can define custom soil model classes. Additionally, pedon only depends on well-maintained packages in the Python scientific ecosystem such as NumPy ([Harris et al., 2020](#)), SciPy ([Virtanen et al., 2020](#)), Matplotlib ([Hunter, 2007](#)), and Pandas ([McKinney, 2010](#); [The pandas development team, 2020](#)).

Soil hydraulic parameters

Soil hydraulic parameters determine the shape of a soil model's SWRC and HCF, but are rarely measured directly. To address this, pedon links these parameters to soil models by providing a unified framework to derive them from reference datasets, empirical relationships, or direct (laboratory) measurements.

Parameter datasets

pedon includes a large dataset of soil model parameters for a wide range of soils, currently compiled from the following sources:

- HYDRUS ([Carsel & Parrish, 1988](#); [Šimůnek et al., 2008](#)) and the Staring series ([Heinen et al., 2020, 2022](#); [Wösten et al., 2001](#)) for Mualem–van Genuchten parameters. HYDRUS provides standard averages across twelve major soil textural groups, while the Staring series derives its values from hundreds of processed Dutch soil samples.
- VS2D ([Healy, 1990](#)) and Rawls et al. ([1982](#)) for Brooks–Corey parameters.
- Clapp & Hornberger ([1978](#)) for Campbell parameters.

For example, a parameter set for a sandy soil (classified as “B05” in the Staring series) can easily be obtained from any of the databases via the following code, enabling direct comparison of the resulting SWRCs (Figure 1).

```
hydrus = pe.Soil("Sand").from_name(pe.Genuchten, source="HYDRUS")
staring = pe.Soil("B05").from_name(pe.Genuchten, source="Staring_2018")
rawls = pe.Soil("Sand").from_name(pe.Brooks, source="Rawls")
clapp = pe.Soil("Sand").from_name(pe.Campbell, source="Clapp")
```

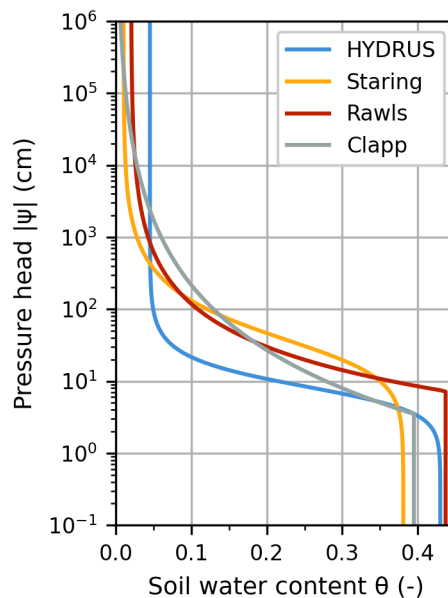


Figure 1: Comparison of SWRCs for a generic sandy soil using parameters retrieved from four different soil databases.

Parameter estimation

pedon provides two approaches for obtaining soil model parameters from soil measurements. The first uses pedotransfer functions based on easily measured soil properties. The second relies on direct measurements of soil water content and hydraulic conductivity.

Pedotransfer functions

Pedotransfer functions relate easily measured soil properties (e.g. sand, silt, clay or organic matter content and bulk density) to soil model parameters (Bouma, 1989; Van Looy et al., 2017). pedon implements a comprehensive suite of pedotransfer functions from the literature, including those of Cosby et al. (1984), Cooper et al. (2021), Saxton et al. (1986), Saxton & Rawls (2006), Rawls & Brakensiek (1989), Vereecken et al. (1989), Vereecken et al. (1990), Wösten et al. (1999), Rosetta (Schaap et al., 2001; Zhang & Schaap, 2017), Wösten et al. (2001), Hodnett & Tomasella (2002), Weynants et al. (2009), Tóth et al. (2015). The code snippet below shows how to apply three different pedotransfer functions to the same soil sample, resulting in different parameter estimates and thus SWRCs (Figure 2).

```
# Create a soil sample with easily measured properties. Note that
# not all pedotransfer functions require all of these properties,
# but this is a common set that covers most cases.
ss = pe.SoilSample(
    sand_p=60.0, # sand (%)
    silt_p=30.0, # silt (%)
    clay_p=10.0, # clay (%)
    om_p=2.5, # organic matter (%)
    rho=1.5, # bulk density (g/cm3)
)

# Estimate van Genuchten parameters using Wösten (HYPRES)
wosten: pe.Genuchten = ss.wosten()
```

```
# Estimate van Genuchten parameters using Rosetta v3
# Optional dependency requiring installation of `httpx`
rosetta: pe.Genuchten = ss.rosetta(version=3)

# Estimate Brooks-Corey parameters using Saxton
saxton: pe.Brooks = ss.saxton()
```

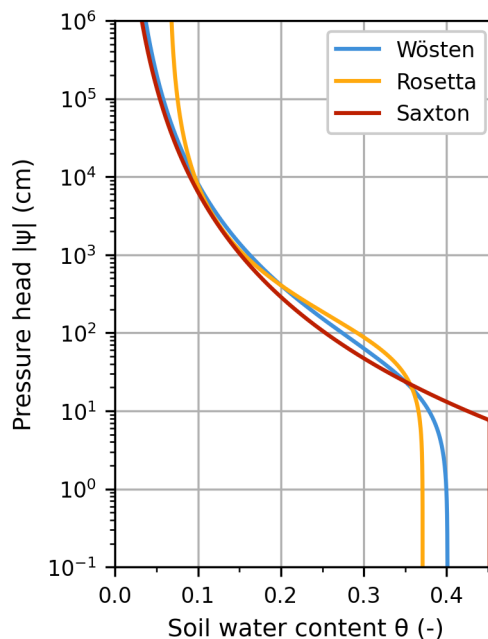


Figure 2: Estimated SWRCs for a single user-defined soil sample using three different pedotransfer functions

Furthermore, pedon provides access to specialized tools such as HYPAGS (Peche et al., 2024; Peche & Houben, 2023) which enables parameter estimation from a single value of saturated hydraulic conductivity or representative grain diameters.

```
# Estimate parameters using HYPAGS
ks = 1e-3 # saturated hydraulic conductivity (m/s)
hypags: pe.Genuchten = pe.SoilSample(k=ks).hypags()
```

Soil hydraulic measurements

pedon can estimate soil model parameters directly when measurements of soil water retention and/or unsaturated hydraulic conductivity are available. A soil model, together with its SWRC and HCF, is fitted to the data by minimizing the difference between measured and simulated values. This uses a nonlinear least-squares algorithm from SciPy (Virtanen et al., 2020) and follows the well-established methodology of the RETC software (van Genuchten et al., 1991).

Soil model conversion

The same fitting procedure can translate between soil models. The SWRC and HCF generated by one model are sampled over a range of pressure heads and refitted using another formulation. This enables direct model comparison (Figure 3) and facilitates integration with external tools when a different soil model is required (Vonk et al., 2024).

```
# Fitting a Brooks-Corey soil model to the SWRC and HCF of a
# Mualem-van Genuchten soil model
bcf = pe.SoilSample(h=h, theta=theta, k=k).fit(pe.Brooks)
```

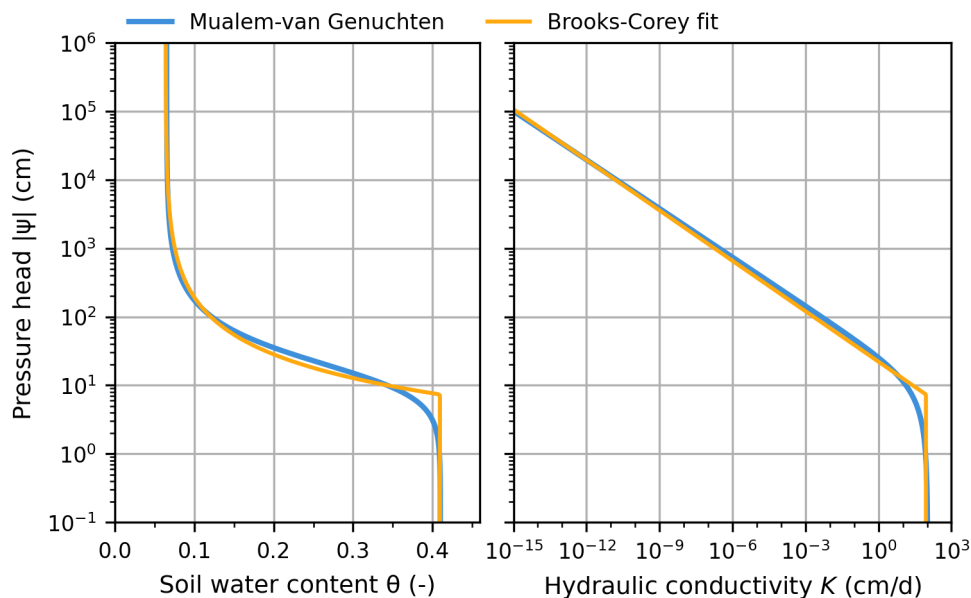


Figure 3: Resulting Brooks-Corey SWRC and HCF after fitting on the Mualem-van Genuchten soil model

State of the field

pedon contributes to the field of groundwater modeling by providing a modular, object-oriented framework that integrates hydraulic soil models, established parameter databases, and pedotransfer functions into a single, reproducible workflow. Existing tools such as `unsatfit` (Seki et al., 2023), `PySWR` (Memari & Clement, 2021), and `RETC` (van Genuchten et al., 1991) are utilities primarily focused on least-squares fitting of predefined soil models. In contrast, `pedon` enables researchers to define custom soil model formulations and systematically evaluate them against different datasets and pedotransfer functions. This level of interoperability is unique and provides a broader framework for the analysis of unsaturated soil hydraulic properties. At the same time, `pedon` is developed with a collaborative mindset, exemplified by the integration and extension of the soil model parameter estimation algorithms from `HYPAGS` (Peche et al., 2024; Peche & Houben, 2023).

Research impact statement

Soil hydraulic models and their parameters are essential for simulating variably saturated groundwater flow (Vereecken et al., 2016). Determining these parameters experimentally is difficult and time-consuming (van Genuchten et al., 1991), and their resulting uncertainty can strongly impact model predictions (Baroni et al., 2010; Brandhorst et al., 2017). Therefore, soil hydraulic model parameters are often approximated or estimated from reference parameter databases. `pedon` bundles soil models and parameter sources in a single framework, enabling efficient parameter derivation without extensive literature searches or ad hoc reimplementations. `pedon` (Vonk & Peche, 2026) is already used in scientific workflows for groundwater modeling, including published studies by Vonk et al. (2024) and Collenteur et al. (2025). Here, `pedon` can easily facilitate coupling to `MODFLOW 6` (Langevin et al., 2017) and `MODFLOW-USG`

Transport (Panday, 2026) via Python (Bakker et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2024). Additionally, pedon was used by van den Brink et al. (2026) to process Dutch soil datasets (Heinen et al., 2022).

AI usage disclosure

GitHub Copilot was used during software development for reviewing pull requests, writing unit tests and documentation, providing code completion, and sanity-checking proposed bug fixes. ChatGPT and Gemini were used for this manuscript to review references, identify linguistic and grammatical errors, and verify compliance with the Journal of Open Source Software requirements. All AI-generated outputs were reviewed by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and originality of the works.

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