

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHAT IS GRAUPEL?

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Besides snowflakes, three different kinds of icy particles fall from the sky. All three are commonly called hail by the man in the street, but science has separate names for them. True hail, containing concentric layers of clear and snowy ice, falls in thunderstorms and mostly in summer. Little lumps of clear ice, like frozen raindrops, falling in cold weather are called sleet. The third kind of icy precipitation is called "graupel." The word is German and the "au" should be pronounced like "ou" in "out."

Graupel takes the form of little pellets of compact snow -- miniature snowballs -- ranging from the size of coarse shot to that of small peas. Meteorologists formerly called it "soft hail," though it is crumbly rather than soft. Graupel often falls mixed with ordinary snow.

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