

## Volcanoes Shaped Columbia Plateau

Volcanic activity formed more than mountains. Lava also helped change the relatively flat Columbia Plateau. It is one of the largest and most spectacular volcanic regions in the world.

Repeated eruptions from long **fissures**, or cracks in the Earth's crust, covered the plateau with lava that spread out more than 100 miles.

### Rich Soil of the Palouse

After the lava flows ended, another feature changed the landscape. Rich soil was formed by deposits of glacial loess. **Loess** is a mixture of fine volcanic ash and dust carried by wind. Soil up to 150 feet deep gradually covered large regions of rock. Today, this is the Palouse wheat-growing region in eastern Washington.



### Basalt

Basalt is igneous rock, formed of hardened lava. Overlapping basalt layers of the plateau are more than 4,000 feet deep, leaving geologists to wonder what might be buried beneath them.



Basalt takes many forms when it cools. How would you describe the form of these rocks?

Volcanic lava helped to create the rich soil of the Palouse. What is the main crop of this region?

