

Dig It *The Secrets of Soil*

*How did your garden grow this summer?
The health of your soil is vital to the health of your plants.*



Fall is a great time to assess the health of your soil and build your soil for the next years growing season.

Maintain a natural balance in your yard.

Your soil is a breathing organism that needs feeding and watering naturally. Using fertilizers improperly can damage beneficial soil organisms, beneficial insects, and animals.

Naturally, soil recycles expired plants into nutrients which enrich the soil and feeds new plant growth. For most shrubs and trees this is all the nutrients they need. Flowers, vegetables, and lawns may need additional nutrients. While purchasing a fertilizer, choose one with “natural, organic, or slow-release” ingredients. Maintaining an assortment of healthy plants, soil organisms, beneficial insects and animals can help keep most pests and diseases away.

Worms really are gardener’s best friends. They feed on organic matter and then help disperse it through the soil, they create tunnels which allow air and water into the soil. You should always encourage these creepy crawlies in your ground.



By allowing nature to work, you can sustain a great-looking yard that is easier to take care of, less expensive and less time consuming to maintain, and healthier for families, pets, wildlife and the environment.

Soil Types

Sandy Soil

Sandy soil doesn’t retain nutrients well and dries out often and too quickly.

To improve the moisture balance and add essential nutrients, spread an initial 3-5 inches of compost over the site and stir into the sandy soil.



Clay Soil

Clay soil is extremely slow to drain, slow to warm in the spring, and has a tendency to heave in the winter. Probably the worst characteristic is that it compacts easily, making it difficult, or sometimes impossible, for plant roots to grow.

To improve clay soil, you will need to add six to eight inches of organic matter. You can use any organic matter that you can acquire, shredded leaves, grass clippings, cured manure, compost, etc. Spread this organic matter and do your best to mix it into the top six to ten inches of the clay soil.



Loam Soil

Loam soil is a good mix of sand, silt or clay, and organic matter. Loam soils are loose and usually rich. This soil type is most desirable with a well-balanced moisture level and loose particles for healthy plant root growth.



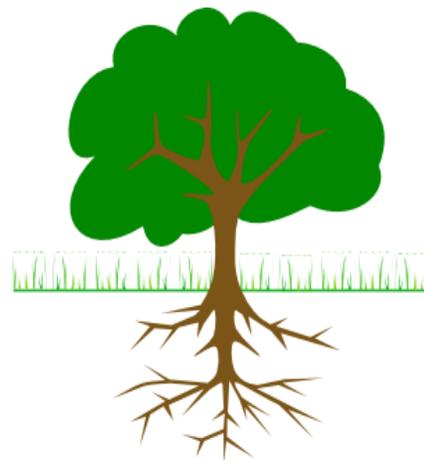
Healthy soil has a good balance of nutrients, and a pH in the 6.2 to 6.8 range.

The 3 major nutrients to grow healthy plants are . . .

Nitrogen:
promotes lush leafy, vegetative growth.

Phosphorus:
helps to form roots, flowers, seeds, and fruit.

Potassium:
builds strong stems and helps fight disease.



Know What Your Soil Needs

Conduct a simple soil test to tell how much nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, and lime your soil has or might need. Depending on the test results, you may not need to apply any additional nutrients. Purchase a soil testing kit from a local Garden Center or contact your local County Cooperative Extension Office.

Fertilizing

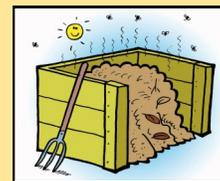
While purchasing a fertilizer, choose one with “natural, organic, or slow-release” ingredients. Using fertilizers improperly can damage beneficial soil life essential for healthy soils and plants. Excess chemicals can find their way into your ground water, streams, and lakes—here they can contaminate drinking water and harm fish and other wildlife.

Compost ~ Feed Your Soil

Composting provides you with rich organic matter that improves the quality of your soil and reduces waste in landfills.

Make Your Own Compost

Yard and food waste are like nature’s gold. Leaves, stems, flowers, grass, vegetable scraps, and coffee grounds can all be added to your compost pile.



It is best to turn your compost pile every few weeks to help distribute air and moisture. During long periods of dry weather, spray water on your pile. Do not add fats, meats, dairy, or bakery products. To supply more beneficial bacteria & aid in the breakdown process, you should add a small portion of garden soil to the compost pile. In most climates, you should expect to have finished compost in 3 to 6 months when the waste becomes a dark, crumbly material that has a uniform texture.