

GARDENING NATURALLY

BY GARY LOCHTE



Regardless of what soil lies in your garden, your soil can be dramatically amended by adding organic matter. If your soil is heavy clay, the addition of organic matter improves both drainage and aeration and also allows better root development. Liberal amounts of organic matter help sandy soil hold water and nutrients.

I am often asked where to obtain organic matter. The answer....it is everywhere! You can utilize grass clippings, wood chips, small sticks, leaves, food scraps, and egg shells; just about any related kinds of matter will work just fine. In due time, the matter breaks down and feeds your plants.

Organic matter improves soil and serves as a food source for soil fungi and bacteria which comes in the form of peat moss, compost, hay, grass clippings, barnyard fertilizer, shredded bark, leaves or even shredded newspapers.

When adding organic matter to soil, supply enough to actually change the soil structure. The best ratio appears to be as follows.....at least one-third of the final soil mix should be some type of organic material. To accomplish this, spread a 2 to 4 inch layer of organic material over the garden surface and rake it to a depth of at least 6 to 10 inches. Tilling is not recommended, and tends to kill the earthworms attempting to occupy the upper layers of the soil. Apply the recommended rate of organic fertilizer over the garden surface at the same time, and rake it in along with the organic material.

Some gardeners prefer a shovel or spading fork to the rototiller for working garden soil, but many look for an easier way to handle this chore. Gardeners who already own tillers will be tempted to use them.....please refrain. Tillers are for impatient gardeners! Take your time and

rake the matter into the soil. The benefits and overall health of your garden soil will be much better.

If you have followed my articles, you know I am a proponent of enriching the soil with wood ash. Good sources of wood ash are from your Bar-B-Que pit, fireplace, or burn piles. Ask your neighbors to save their wood ashes for you. Just dispense wood ash directly on the garden soil.

Wood ash is almost 100% mineral with many of impurities burned out. You might recall that as recent as one or two generations ago, our ancestors cooked using wood stoves. The wood ash was collected from the stoves and used to fortify the soil. The mineral rich soil digested the minerals, and the food producing plants assimilated them. The result was mineral rich plants. When people and animals consumed the mineral rich plants, they became strong, healthy, and peaceful.

I am aware that fortification of your garden soils is work.....and, it takes time. But the results are long-lasting and extremely beneficial.

Previously I recommended a video titled "Back to Eden" which can be viewed on-line for free. In this presentation, my friend Paul Gautschi describes this practical soil fortification process.

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