



Healthy Soil is a Necessary Foundation



As winter fades and the days begin to lengthen, gardeners eagerly look forward to the growing season ahead. Before seeds are planted or new plants are tucked into the earth, the most important work begins below the surface. Healthy, well-prepared soil is the foundation of a thriving garden. Taking time in early spring to amend and nurture your soil sets the stage for stronger plants, better yields, and a more enjoyable gardening experience.

Every garden is unique, and spring preparation begins with understanding what your soil needs. A soil test offers valuable insight into pH levels, nutrient availability, and organic matter content. Most vegetables and ornamentals grow best in slightly acidic to neutral soil (pH 6.0–7.0), but testing removes the guesswork. Over the counter soil testing kits are the easiest way to determine pH. Though if you are

feeling adventurous you can take a sample of 2 samples of soil and test them against vinegar and baking soda respectively.

It's also helpful to notice your soil's texture. Is it sandy and quick draining? Dense and clay-heavy? Or soft and crumbly like (loamy)? Observing how your soil feels in your hands can guide you in choosing the right amendments. The idea is to work with our soil as opposed to against it.

Adding organic matter is, typically, the backbone to a healthy garden. It improves structure, encourages beneficial microbes, and helps soil hold just the right amount of moisture. There are a few ways to go about this:

-finished compost: store bought compost will help in uniformity and revitalize plant beds after winter

-manure: either well aged or composted manure can help give a shot of nitrogen. Just be sure it's somewhat aged (in case you have access to your own supply).

-home compost: in case you like to save your leaves and create your own compost pile. This option is the most sustainable and ecologically available. It does take a bit more preparation than the other options, which might be the most rewarding too.

If your soil pH needs adjusting, soil amendments can be added to help balance it. Easiest amendments would be lime (calcium carbonate) to help raise it and sulfur to help lower it. Adjustments should be made thoughtfully and gradually. You want to go for small corrections as this can make a big difference in plant vitality. Too drastic a change can end up hurting your plants instead. This should also be a good chance to till and gently loosen topsoil to improve air flow and promote root growth (winter rains often leave soil compacted). In heavy clay soil, repeated additions of compost are far more beneficial than adding sand. Over time, consistent organic matter transforms dense soil into something rich and workable.



While compost supplies a broad range of nutrients, some gardens may benefit from additional feeding. Nitrogen encourages leafy growth, phosphorus supports roots and blooms, and potassium strengthens overall plant health. Organic options such as bone meal, blood meal, or kelp meal can offer gentle, balanced nourishment. A broad application of store-bought fertilizer would help too (especially if you have a large area to work with). Just remember that too much of anything can become harmful. Always remember to water in any fertilizer you apply (you can time it with heavy rainfall if you're feeling ecological).

As planting time approaches:

- Clear away weeds and leftover debris.
- Rake beds smooth for seeds and transplants.
- Allow amendments to settle for a few days.
- Water lightly if the soil feels dry.

Raised beds may warm more quickly in spring, offering an early start but also benefit from consistent organic enrichment. Raised beds also tend to need more regular irrigation as water tends to drain away from the slope. Still important to not overwater (irrigation can be its own topic, honestly).

Preparing soil in early spring is an act of optimism. It reflects trust in the coming season and care for the plants yet to grow. By enriching the soil with organic matter, balancing nutrients, and nurturing its living ecosystem, gardeners create the conditions for abundance.

When we tend the soil thoughtfully, the garden responds generously; rewarding us with growth, beauty, and harvests that begin long before the first seed sprouts.

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