

Stop Treating Your Soil Like Dirt

By Michael Morris, The Flower Bin

It's time to stop treating our clay soils like dirt.

Clay is an important part of any healthy soil and we certainly have an abundance of it in our gardens so why not put it to use. The reason clay is difficult to grow in is because it's so compacted and so dense, all the air has been squeezed out of it.

Plant roots need air as much as anything else to grow in. Without air, roots drown. The best way to remedy this is to add organic material to your clay soil. This is called amending your garden soil and products like peat moss, compost, aged manure are some of the best amendments to break up the clay and turn it into healthy soil.

Typically, you'll spread two to three inches of organic material onto your garden and work it in six to seven inches deep. For example, a one cubic foot bag of finished compost will cover 10 square feet section of your garden about 1" deep.

A good source of compost material comes from your own yard. As long as you're not using "weed and feed" fertilizers on your lawn, use your bagged clippings as mulch between your vegetable rows, then turn them into the garden in the fall. They'll compost over the winter.

Another way to enrich your garden soils is to use organic fertilizers, especially ones that contain mycorrhizae. Mycorrhizae are beneficial fungi that will strengthen and expand your crop's root systems. This helps plants absorb water and nutrients more efficiently and your yields go up.

Cover crops like winter rye can be planted in the spring, then cut and worked into the soil.

These are just a few ideas on how to improve your garden soil. Keep in mind that amending your clay soil isn't a one and done event. It's a process that will be repeated every season for the life of your garden. Stop by your local, independent garden center. They'll have the soil amendments and fertilizers you need to improve your soil and help you produce your best crops yet!

