

# Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, April 2019



## Horticultural Classroom: What's the Dirt?

Good soil makes happy plants, and happy plants make happy gardeners! Of the many elements plants need for healthy growth, most come from soil. This is why it's very important to know what kind of soil you have (sandy, loam, rocky, or clay); its pH level (acidic or alkaline); and if it's lacking any essential nutrients for good growth (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, etc.).

Before planting, it's a good idea to test your soil to check the nutrients and pH levels as different plants prefer different pH levels. pH test kits can be found at your local garden center, or you can send a soil sample to <http://ag.umass.edu/services/soil-plant-nutrient-testing-laboratory/ordering-information-forms>. pH levels range from 1–14 with optimum soil conditions falling some-



where between 5.5–7.0. Lower pH numbers indicate a more acidic soil, and pH numbers above 7.0 indicate a more alkaline soil. In general, to create good soil for healthy plants, add 4 inches of organic material (peat moss, compost, compost blend, etc.)

on top of the soil and work it into the top 8 or 9 inches. While doing this, you can also work in a fertilizer 8-32-16) at 1-1/4 pounds per 100 square feet. Adjusting your pH level to reach the optimum neutral levels can be accomplished by adding lime to acidic soils to raise the pH, and sulfur to alkaline soils to lower the pH.

For more information, see the UMass Agriculture Extension website's research and outreach education fact sheets on Home Lawn & Garden topics that include soil amendments and fertilizing: <https://ag.umass.edu/home-lawn-garden/fact-sheets/fertilizing-flower-garden-plants>.

Questions? Contact your Horticulture Committee:

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## April Garden Reminders

- Sharpen, clean, oil tools, disinfect pots, containers
- Continue spring cleanup
- Prune trees and shrubs; prune spring flowering shrubs after blooming
- Enrich soil with compost, manure, superphosphate
- Sow annual seeds in cold frames; sow warm and cool season vegetables and herbs outside (when temperature is up to 60°)
- Plant trees and shrubs; roses (balled/burlapped, container, or bare root); groundcovers; and perennials
- Fertilize woody plants before new growth; trees and shrubs (high nitrogen organic fertilizer); emerging perennials (5-10-5); bulbs (superphosphate, manure, organic fertilizer) after blooming; and roses (manure or rose organic fertilizer)



## Happenings

Earth Day, Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>. RGC will have a table on Composting at the Community House manned by Lisa Simms from 9–1. See the town's website for other activities.

- Workshop, "Create Your Own Container Garden," Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 10–Noon, Nunan Florist & Greenhouses in Georgetown. Bring your own container; you will only pay for the materials you use. To sign up email: [moorbymary@gmail.com](mailto:moorbymary@gmail.com).