



A SIMPLE SOIL TEST

Soils are classed into three basic groups Sand, Silt or Clay.

Sandy soil offers good drainage and air circulation, but it dries out quickly and doesn't hold any nutrients.

Silty soil is good at holding moisture and nutrients, but it dries out quickly.

Clay soils are fertile and holds a lot of moisture, however it is heavy and difficult to work. It's slow to drain so plants may rot, and when it dries it becomes hard and cracks.

To aid in determining your soil test you will need a large clear jar such as a mason jar. Dig down into the soil about 4" – 6" and collect a ½ cup of soil. Place the soil into the jar with 2 cups of water and a few drops of dish soap. Shake the jar vigorously for a couple of minutes and then set aside to let the soil settle for 24 hours.

Once the soil has settled look at the jar under bright sunlight. The soil will be settled in layers. Coarse sand will settle on the bottom, the next layer will be silt and the top layer will be clay. Any organic matter will float.

To analyze your soil sample:

SAND – if over ½ you have light sandy soil

SILT – if over ½ you have a silty soil

CLAY – if over ½ you have clay soil

LOAM – 2/5 sand, 2/5 silt and a narrow band of clay.

A loam soil is the ideal medium for your garden plants to thrive and it makes for easy gardening for you.

Irrigation is more efficient because the moisture soaks into the soil rather than running off.

It takes fewer muscles to work in loam soil because of the good tilth. It's easy to dig and weeding is simple because the roots give up their grip more easily.

The silt, clay and organic matter in a loam soil retain nutrients for the plants and makes it easy for the plants to absorb.

If your soil is not loam, with a little work it can be improved, to make your gardens thrive.



If the organic content of your soil is low add 3” – 6” of organic material and work it into the soil. Bagged manure or compost is the best choice, if you use farmyard manure or landfill compost be aware that weeds could become a problem.

Lighten your heavy clay soil by adding lots of organic matter and coarse builders sand. Do not use play sand because it is too fine and will only make the soil problems worse. A good-composted mix of straw, manure and a little sand is a great amendment for clay soil.

To improve sandy soil the key once again is to add lots of organic matter.

If you don't have the time or energy to improve the soil you have then make your gardens in raised beds and fill them with a deep layer of a good loamy soil at least 12 inches deep.