

Healthy Garden/Healthy Soil

Thankfully, we have been blessed with a good amount of spring precipitation, and many gardeners are optimistic about this year's growing potential.

A good healthy soil is foundational for growing plants. This includes ample organic matter, good drainage, sufficient water holding capacity, a rich supply of nutrients and active biological life. Unfortunately, healthy soils are commonly removed during the building process, leaving a new home sitting atop sub-soils, which are often compacted and devoid of nutrients.

Before you can build a healthy soil, you need to know what you have to work with. Soil tests are a great way to determine soil pH, nutrient contents and organic matter content. Simply feeling the soil, running it through your fingers is a good way to identify the texture of your soil. Sandy soils feel gritty and clods break apart very easily. Clay soils are sticky and clods are very hard. A clay soil can be molded in your hands. Loam soils, the ideal condition for gardening, feel smooth in your hand. They are easy to work.

Surface and sub-soil types vary significantly across the state. If you live near a river you may have a very sandy soil, while other areas have heavy clays. Fortunately, the secret to improving soil is the same for both conditions. And that secret is organic matter. Organic matter is a term used to describe living and dead materials derived from plants or animals including, compost, manure, straw, leaves, grass clippings or kitchen scraps. Organic matter enriches soils by providing a surface area where water and nutrients can bind. In clay soils, organic matter loosens structure to improve drainage. Organic matter also invites beneficial organisms into the soil. Soils rich in organic matter are going to have a darker color and many more nutrients.

While it stands to be a good spring for getting gardens in and going, we probably can anticipate many garden pests such as aphids, sow bugs, and such, are just as eager to get into the garden. While many products are available to help fight these pests, there is no replacement for simply spending time, observing what is going on in the garden. For many, this is therapeutic, however, only 15 or 20 minutes every couple days can go a long ways towards warding off disasters before they get out of hand. Mulching under plants not only conserves soil moisture, but reduces soil splash which can encourage fungal issues on lower plant portions. Planting improved varieties can also provide protection and resistance to many garden plant diseases.

Please feel free to stop by the office or contact me (580)622-3016, if I can be of assistance.

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