Combating issues dealing with poorly drained soil

No matter how green your thumb is, gardening will likely be a struggle for gardeners dealing with poorly drained soil.

For some landscapes, the simple addition of organic matter will address many of the problems associated with the soil. However, some issues can’t be fixed in this manner. Areas where water often drains that are low, have poor soil or sit at the end of a slope are more likely to have problem spots associated with poor drainage.

In many urban sites, the upper 8 inches or so of the soil are in very good condition from years of compost and organic matter inputs, but when digging deeper, we find compacted clay subsoil. This subsoil has very poor drainage, and more often than not, plants often struggle to survive in these locations.

Sometimes, affordable options for maintaining these areas can be limited. Excavating the soil to 18 to 24 inches is one method, but this process isn’t cheap, and in some cases, can create even more problems. This solution also is a no-go in areas featuring established trees and shrubs.

Another option is a sub-surface drainage pipe, also known as a French drain, that is installed to help pull excess water away from problem areas. Again, this comes at an expense. An easier and less costly fix that will work in some cases is simply installing raised beds. Gardeners also can reduce water issues through careful irrigation management.

The easiest option for poor water drainage is to install plants that don’t mind having wet feet. Consider trees such as deciduous holly, red buckeye, river birch, bald cypress and black gum.

Shrubs that do well in wet areas include chokeberry, summersweet, buttonbush and waxmyrtle.

Homeowners who need a good turfgrass that can withstand poor drainage should consider switchgrass, inland sea oats, feather reed grass, prairie dropseed and sedges. Fill flower beds with perennials including yarrow, beebalm, milkweed, ironweed and New England Aster.

Be sure to check with your local Oklahoma State University Extension office for more gardening tips. Click on County Offices.

###