

# How to Organically Improve Your Soil

You may be a new gardener or you may be an experienced gardener, but what all gardeners will eventually learn is that it's hard to be successful at it if you don't have good soil to work with. The soil is the foundation of our plants, the same way a foundation supports your home. If the foundation is not strong then all the temporary fixes you make up top will not have a lasting effect. If the foundation is weak then the structure is weak as well.

Your soil is actually alive with microorganisms so your soil needs to be fed with organic amendments on a regular basis. The same way your body uses food as fuel, the organisms in the soil use the organic matter in the soil as their food. If there is no food for them to feed on, they die. These microorganisms provide your plants with nutrients and help defend against pests and diseases. If the soil is dead then it will be a lot harder for your plants to survive. What many people don't realize is that chemical fertilizers and amendments only mask the real problem, sort of like putting a band aid on a severed limb...it just doesn't work in the long run. Most chemicals actually kill off the microorganisms in the soil so you have a more compound problem that adding more chemicals to only makes worse.

So the first thing you can do to improve your soil is to **stop using chemical fertilizers and pesticides!**

I know, it sounds drastic. We've been conditioned to believe that we have to purchase expensive chemicals to fertilize our plants and to get rid of bugs, but it's just not true. If we needed them, then why are the forests thriving and healthy? Why do the wildflowers bloom so beautifully in spring and summer on acres and acres of land that hasn't had a person tending to them in years? Because Mother Nature has a way of taking care of herself. There is a balance in nature that we as a human race tend to disrupt because we are pompous enough to think that we can make it better.

Once you have stopped using chemicals, get a soil test done by your local cooperative extension office. They will be able to tell you what needs to be added to your soil to make it better based on the type of soil that you have and it's current levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and micronutrients. If you don't know where your local office is, check out the [USDA website](#) for more info.

Even though I strongly suggest you have a soil test done, I realize that many people will not take the time to do that. It's never wise to add amendments to the soil without knowing for sure what it needs. You can end up wasting time and money and possibly making things worse, but since this article is about organic methods to improving your soil, I don't see any harm in talking further about what I add to my soil to make it better.

The magic ingredients that makes my soil so great and my plants grow strong and healthy is....drum roll please.....COMPOST. Yep, compost...that's it! You can make compost yourself, or buy it by the bag at a good nursery. You can lay it on top of your soil as mulch and let the worms and other organisms work it into the soil. If your soil is really bad, work compost into the top 5-6 inches of soil to give it a head start. Compost improves water retention in sandy soils and improves drainage in clay soils and is a natural fertilizer, so it's a real all around winner in my opinion, no matter where you live or what kind of soil you have.

The real key is to add organic matter to your soil to improve it. The best way is to add compost on a yearly basis. You can add organic matter in other ways by using natural mulches such as shredded

wood or bark, shredded leaves, pine needles and grass clippings. All will breakdown over time and add nutrients to the soil.

Worms are attracted to organic matter and their castings (worm poop) are extremely beneficial to the soil by providing nutrients and disease resistant properties. You can purchase worm castings too add to your garden soil, but it can get expensive. I do keep a small amount on hand that I add to my container plantings. If you want to make your own worm castings, check out [The Worm Digest](#) for more info on vermicomposting.

So in conclusion, stop using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and add organic matter to your soil, preferably in the form of compost and organic mulches. That's it. It's not rocket science, and it may take a few years to really see the improvement, but I guarantee, your plants and Mother Earth will thank you for it.

[www.gardensandcrafts.com](http://www.gardensandcrafts.com)