

# Natural Soil Improvement

Healthy soil = healthy plants. Soil needs organic matter (leaf litter, compost, aged manures, grass clippings etc.). Worms and other micro-organisms break down organic matter to make food for plants. Worms also aerate the soil so that plant roots can breathe.

Organic matter needs to be replaced as plants absorb nutrients. If organic matter is not regularly added, the soil may become hard or dusty in the summer and a sticky mess in the winter.

In addition, many people want a low maintenance garden. This is much easier to achieve if you look after your soil.

## Soil Improvement Tips

- Don't cultivate your soil unless it is very compacted. Digging destroys the soil structure by reducing air pockets and drainage spaces which are both necessary in healthy soils.
- When watering use a trigger hose with a spray setting so as not to compact the soil as the water hits. The concentrated pressure of the water stream can close up valuable air spaces.
- Spreading compost and aged manure over your soil (before mulching) will encourage worms in your garden.
- Organic mulches will break down over time adding nutrients to your soil. Straw-based mulches e.g. pea straw and lucerne, break down quickly and are ideal for your fast growing vegetables. Bark and bush mulches have very few nutrients and are best suited to native plants with low nutrient requirements.
- When buying new soil for your garden do not just buy topsoil, buy a soil that is mixed with recycled organics or compost.
- If you have clay soil, consider applying gypsum to break up the soil.
- For sandy soils add compost and aged manures to improve soil structure, water holding capacity and nutrient content.



- Remember to feed the soil and not the plant.
- Invest in a soil pH testing kit. The pH is the test of alkalinity and acidity of the soil. Having the correct pH of the soil can make the nutrients more readily available to the plant.