



Winter Garden Tips

Simple Steps for Building Healthy Soils

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SUCCESSFULLY PLACING PLANTS is not just about aesthetics and the art of design, it also should consider soil compatibility and the science of horticulture.

Improving soil health will maximize plant productivity. Healthy soil supports plants in times of stress during drought or excessive moisture. Healthy soil contains both inert and living components and is a mix of plant roots, organic matter, arthropods (e.g., insects and spiders), minerals, oxygen, and water. Microscopic organisms are critical in healthy living soils and include bacteria, fungi, protozoa, and nematodes. As a noted soil expert explains, “everything that we do to improve soil health is really aimed at building and maintaining a diverse population of soil microorganisms.”

Here are some practices that will help increase populations of these beneficial organisms and result in healthy soil:

- Soils will vary in different areas of your property. An area of clay may be adjacent to an area of sand; an excessively moist area may be adjacent to a dry area. Have a soil test performed by a professional soil testing lab to understand your soil's health, fertility, and physical characteristics. Once idiosyncrasies of your site are identified, you can make improvements.

- Feed your soils and boost populations of microscopic organisms. Add a 1-inch layer of compost before adding a 1.5-inch layer of mulch. If you don't already compost, now is the perfect time to set up circular bins made of four 5-foot metal T-posts, circled by 4-foot-tall rabbit fencing to create bins about 6 feet in diameter. We recommend three bins: one for new plant debris, one that is actively composting, and one that contains ready-to-use compost.
- Go organic with garden products. Inorganic chemicals and products can kill the microbes that live in the soils and that contribute to soil building and plant growth. Good soil is alive with good microbes.
- Spray and feed plants and soils with fish emulsion.
- If available, apply composted horse manure.
- Just say no to herbicides: remove weeds before they go to seed.

Make 2020 the year of healthy soils in your garden, and remember to dedicate time every year to boosting soil with these techniques. You will begin to see plants not just survive, but thrive. The secret path to a greener thumb is truly hiding in the soil! 🌱



NANCY AND PIERRE MOITRIER operate *Designs for Greener Gardens*, a boutique gardening company that specializes in designing, creating, developing, and maintaining distinctive gardens of all styles. Pierre hails from France and brings the charm of the Old World to their garden creations. Nancy's 40 years of gardening experience combined with her design knowledge and innate artistic eye add a superior dimension to their garden projects. Follow *Designs for Greener Gardens* on Facebook.