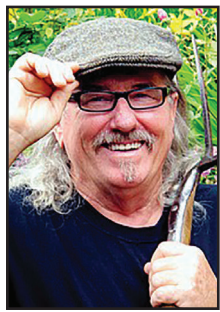


# Perfecting the perfect potting soil

Gardening and home cooking have a lot in common, creating sustenance and comfort by combining basic ingredients using simple techniques. Fertilizers are like salt and pepper; a little bit goes a long way. And adding stuff to your soil is like crumbling crackers into soup or chili.



**FELDER RUSHING**

Pretty much everyone knows that plain dirt doesn't work for potted plants and raised beds because it takes time for water to soak in and then stays too wet for roots to breathe. And when it finally dries out, it's hard as a brick. So, most folks till or dig other stuff into it to help with

drainage and aeration, and to help water soak in more easily and then not dry out too fast. How much to add is always a big question, which is where my crackers and chili simile comes in. If you add less than a handful of crackers, you can't tell you stirred in any at all, while more than two handfuls turns the chili into mush. Similarly, a two- to four-inch layer of organic matter such as bark, compost, cheap potting soil, or the like to a shovel's depth of dirt is just about the same ratio as the one or two handfuls of crackers in chili.

Along those lines, this past week, while helping



**A good soil mix and mulch make a great raised bed.**

a community group with a new raised bed garden, and preparing several big pots for planting pepper plants and other veggies in my own garden, I have felt like an old-time alchemist turning raw ingredients into garden gold.

My potting soil recipe, honed over decades of both commercial plant production and home gardening, is simple. The best ones on the market are expensive, so I make my own. I take cheap potting soil and add either crunchy white perlite or chipped bark mulch to it to help water soak in quickly and allow air to get down to the bottom for deeper, stronger roots with less chance from root diseases.

Raised beds are a bit different. Incidentally, those constructed on top of the ground or on a drive or patio, or have weed barrier cloth put underneath, aren't really raised beds, they are just big, relatively shallow containers. Because they can dry out very quickly, I always add some real topsoil to my planting mix, to firm it up and hold water and nutrients longer. I use about one part real dirt to three or four parts of potting mix, which seems about right to me.

My experience from de-

acades of raised bed garden has shown me that a partly-sunk, partly-raised approach is best. Helps them drain better in wet weather so plants can grow deeper roots into cool soil during the heat and drought of summer, without needing to be watered as often as above-ground beds.

So, for raised beds built over the lawn I dig the existing dirt underneath a shovel or so deep, turning the grass sod upside down (becomes organic matter later), then adding more topsoil to fill it up a bit more. Then I blend in bark, compost, manure, or bark. Sometimes a bit of all those.

Once I am done mixing and lightly packing it down, I mulch with bark, which keeps the soil cool and moist in the summer, reduces weeds, and can be turned into the soil the next time I plant to add extra organic matter. I just pull back the mulch when planting.

All this is a lot of trouble, but, done right the first time, it's pure magic from then on. Like tucking into a good bowl of chili and crackers.

*Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Gardener" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.*

## Attorney General Fitch prepares to sue China on behalf of Mississippians

### *Fitch asks Mississippi's congressional delegation to support legislation to ease the way to justice*

**Press Release**

Attorney General Lynn Fitch announced Wednesday, April 22, that she is preparing to file a lawsuit against China to hold the Communist nation accountable for the malicious and dangerous acts that caused death, health injuries, and serious economic loss from the COVID-19 crisis.

"Too many Mississippians have suffered as a result of China's cover-up," said Attorney General Fitch. "They must not be

allowed to act with impunity. Mississippians deserve justice and I will seek that in court."

General Fitch's case will seek damages under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA) and is similar to a case filed earlier last week by the State of Missouri.

General Fitch also wrote to the Mississippi Congressional delegation to ask their support for legislation sponsored by Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) and Congressman Dan Crenshaw

(R-TX) that would create a very specific exception in FSIA for Americans to seek such damages, creating an even clearer pathway to victory for the people of Mississippi.

The text of her letter is below. It was sent to all six members of the Mississippi delegation.

"I am writing to urge you to be an original cosponsor for [Representative Dan Crenshaw's] Senator Tom Cotton's Holding the Chinese Communist Party Accountable for Infecting

Americans Act of 2020. This bill would give Americans the opportunity to sue China in federal court to recover damages related to death, injury, and economic loss suffered as a result of the Coronavirus.

"China did the world a great injustice by engaging in a complex cover-up of the dangers of this deadly virus. By silencing journalists, doctors, whistleblowers, and others, China exposed millions to the Coronavirus and kept the world from preparing, leading to higher death tolls and more dangerous public health impacts. They must be held to account for the damage they have done.

"There are ways to sue China under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA), and I intend to pursue those on behalf of the people of this great State. But [Representative Crenshaw's] Senator Cotton's bill would give Mississippians an even clearer path to victory over China in the courts. The bill, which creates a very narrow exception to the FSIA, is modeled on the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, which passed with overwhelming and bipartisan support in, and would be specific to the COVID-19 crisis.

"Too many have gotten seriously ill or died. Too many have lost their jobs and suffered the significant and lasting economic consequences that follow. Our State is experiencing tangible fiscal loss now and that will likely continue into the future. Mississippi families and businesses deserve to be made whole for China's malicious and dangerous actions. I hope you will cosponsor [Representative Crenshaw's] Senator Cotton's bill to help them take this step toward recovery."

## CDC gives state \$6.5 million to boost COVID-19 testing, contact tracing and containment

**Press Release**

U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) announced on Thursday, April 23, that Mississippi will receive more than \$6.5 million to build its COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, and containment capacities as the nation takes steps to safely reopen the U.S. economy.

The Centers for Disease Control funding from the from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act will help Mississippi boost its infectious disease response capabilities, which will help inform decisions on protecting the public while taking action to emerge from shutdown orders.

"Effective containment of the coronavirus will rely on more testing and tracing. The CDC is providing resources to states to use public health systems to accelerate this process, which will help move us to a point where we can safely reopen our

economy," said Hyde-Smith, who serves on Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee.

The funding, the second CDC award to Mississippi this month, may be used to enhance test capacity, control high-risk settings to protect vulnerable populations, monitor healthcare system capacity, and other actions.

Earlier this week, Hyde-Smith joined Senator John Cassidy, M.D. (R-La.) and others to urge the CDC and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to maximize existing reportable infectious disease framework to trace COVID-19 to determine and log who has developed antibodies to novel coronavirus and track who may be immune.

In a letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar and CDC Director Robert R. Redfield, M.D., the Senators contend this data will be pivotal in determining when, where,

and how to safely reopen the economy.

"This type of information is critical to protect patients, workers and higher risk populations (such as those who are older or those with comorbidities). Employment and social interaction rules can be dynamically adjusted to benefit the employee, workplace productivity, public health and stability, while containing the spread of disease," the Senators wrote. "To expeditiously begin this process, existing capabilities at HHS and the CDC should be expanded and used, while states and territories build up their own detection and surveillance infrastructure. These systems are governed by robust privacy laws. We urge you to build on the CDC and states existing systems so that this work can be completed as quickly and efficiently as possible. To begin to restore our economy, we the undersigned believe this work must begin now."

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