

How to prepare soil for spring planting

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and perhaps nowhere is that rebirth more noticeable than in the yard. Each spring, grass begins to grow again as inviting landscapes beckon people outdoors.

Extra sunlight and rising temperatures make spring a great time to plant flowers, grasses and trees. To ensure successful planting, homeowners must take steps to prepare the soil. Healthy soil can provide the ideal conditions for roots to take hold, helping plants establish themselves before potentially harsh summer conditions arrive.

Preparing soil might seem like an extensive job, but a simple approach may be all that's necessary to create conditions that promote plant growth this spring.

- Clean up the previous months' mess. Whether homeowners live in regions marked by year-round warmth or places where winter typically features heavy snowfall, it's a good idea to clean up an area prior to spring planting.

Fallen leaves, rocks, grass clippings, and other debris can contribute to compacted soil that makes it hard for plants to establish strong, healthy root systems. Clear away any debris prior to planting before taking the next step in your soil preparation routine.

- Loosen the soil. Once debris has been cleared away, loosen the soil. Depending on the size of the area where you'll be planting, you may need to invest in tools

like a shovel, spade, spading fork, and/or a lawn edger.

If you're planting in a small area, such as a deck planter box that still has soil from last year's planting inside it, you can either clean the box and replace the soil entirely or dig around with a handheld trowel, cultivator and/or weeder.

It's important to loosen all of the soil around where you will ultimately plant prior to planting to ensure water can reach the roots and help them establish themselves once planting is completed.

- Test and, if necessary, amend the soil. A simple pH test can help determine the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. This is an important step as soil that is too acidic or alkaline can decrease the availability of nutrients the plants will need to thrive.

In addition to conducting a pH test, which can be purchased at little cost at a local home improvement store, homeowners can contact their local Cooperative Extension Service to test their soil quality. These tests will reveal soil pH, but also can shed light on the texture of the soil and other components. Once the test is conducted, the local Coop Extension Service may recommend amendments to improve the nutritional quality of the soil so new plants can thrive.

Soil conditions go a long way toward determining if new plants will thrive. Preparing the soil prior to spring planting can ensure a successful season.



Photo courtesy of Metro Creative Graphics

IMPROVING LANDSCAPE — The maintenance required to keep a plant healthy and looking good is a key consideration when designing a landscape.

Tips to pick the right plants to improve your landscape

Each year, gardening enthusiasts anxiously await the arrival of spring. Spring is a great season to plant new flowers, plants, grasses, and trees, making it a popular time of year to spend sunny days out in the yard.

Veteran gardeners may know their landscapes well and be able to pick the right plants on their own. Novices may need a little help as they look to give their landscapes a whole new look. The following are some helpful tips to help homeowners pick the right plants for their landscapes.

- Conduct a site evaluation. A colorful landscape featuring an array of plants and flowers can be eye-catching and add curb appeal to a property. However, where plants will be planted is a significant variable that must be considered before homeowners choose what to plant. The Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst notes that site evaluation is the first step when picking plants. A number of factors must be evaluated, including light availability; water availability; exposure to the elements, including wind and extreme tempera-

tures; and competition from existing vegetation, among other things. Document these variables prior to picking plants. For example, take note of the area you plan to plant to see if it is full sun or partial shade, and then pick plants whose growing conditions align with those you observe.

- Look at more than looks. Aesthetic appeal might be what homeowners most desire from their landscapes, but that appeal is only achieved when the right plants are chosen for a space. If the wrong plants are chosen, they're unlikely to thrive or they could threaten existing vegetation, thus compromising the overall appeal of the property. Native plants can often handle local weather conditions, so prioritize natives over more exotic plants whose key attribute is aesthetic appeal. If jaw-dropping aesthetic appeal is your top priority, speak with a local landscaping professional about which natives can provide that without compromising surrounding vegetation.

- Consider maintenance prior to planting. Maintenance is another variable gardeners must consid-

er. Newly planted trees may require substantial watering until they've fully established their roots, and some homeowners may not have time for that. In addition, certain plants may require a considerable amount of pruning in order to create and maintain the look homeowners desire. Individuals must be willing to invest the time and effort necessary to maintain new plantings that require such diligence. If not, look for plants that don't require much maintenance while keeping in mind that even low-maintenance plants still require some effort and attention.

- Consider local wildlife. If your lawn is routinely visited by local wildlife, then look for plants that won't look like a meal to these welcome, if uninvited, guests. For example, if you routinely see deer lounging around in your backyard, look for deer-resistant plants. This is a good way to protect your investment, of both time and money, and ensure minimal wildlife traffic through your newly landscaped yard.

Spring gardens are awe-inspiring, especially when homeowners embrace various strategies for successful planting.



Photo courtesy of Metro Creative Graphics

SPRING SOIL — Preparing soil might seem like an extensive job, but a simple approach may be all that's necessary to create conditions that promote plant growth this spring.

Getting to the root of sodic soil

Plants often are only as strong as the soil in which they grow. While certain greenery may thrive no matter where it's planted, soil conditions are often key to successful growing.

Sodic soil is one condition people may experience at home or in commercial farming operations. Sodic soils, sometimes called saline-alkali soils or dispersive soils, are defined as having high levels of exchangeable sodium and low levels of total salts, according to the Colorado State University Extension. These conditions compromise growing conditions because sodic soils tend to be poorly drained and crust over. Water intake also can be poor in sodic soils, and pH is usually high — coming in above 9.0.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development of the Government of Western Australia advises a simple sodic soil test to check for sodicity. One can collect dry soil aggregates (crumbs of soil) from different depths. Those crumbs should be placed into a clear jar of distilled water, taking care not to mix or agitate the soil. The water around the edges of sodic soil will become cloudy and appear milky. For highly dispersive soil, the dispersion will be evident after about 10 to 30 minutes. Moderately sodic soil may take 2 hours.

Individuals can take steps to improve sodic soil. Gypsum is the most commonly used amendment for sodic soil, according to Science Direct. It also can reduce the harmful effects



Photo courtesy of Metro Creative Graphics

SODIC SOIL — Sodic soil is one condition people may experience at home or in commercial farming operations.

of high-sodium irrigation waters. Gypsum is a mineral that is composed of hydrated calcium sulfate. Gypsum has an effect on reducing the rate of soil erosion. It is more effective when gypsum is spread on the soil surface rather than mixed in.

Limestone, which also contains calcium, is another additive that can amend sodic soils. Gardeners may want to add calcium to the

soil because it replaces the sodium and then the sodium can be leached out.

Additional mitigation methods for sodic soils include changing plant species or varieties to more tolerant ones that will grow more readily.

Commercial farmers or home gardeners may encounter sodic soil. Though sodic soil is not ideal, it can be remedied in various ways.

Save now with

50% OFF*

Your First Application

Get the most out of your lawn this spring.

SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT TODAY!

1-866-942-9045

*Requires purchase of annual plan. Special price is for first Lawn application only. Requires purchase of annual plan, for new residential EasyPay or PrePay customers only. Valid at participating TruGreen locations. Availability of services may vary by geography. Not to be combined with or used in conjunction with any other offer or discount. Additional restrictions may apply. Consumer responsible for all sales tax. †Purchase of annual lawn plan required for TruGreen Lawn Assessment, which is performed at the first visit. *Guarantee applies to annual plan customers only. BBB accredited since 07/01/2012. ©2023 TruGreen Limited Partnership. All rights reserved. In Connecticut, B-0153, B-1380, B-0127, B-0200, B-0151.

The Bath or Shower You've Always Wanted

IN AS LITTLE AS 1 DAY

\$1000 OFF* | **No Payments & No Interest for 18 Months****

AND Military & Senior Discounts Available

OFFER EXPIRES 6/30/2023

CALL NOW!

(866) 398-7349

*Includes product and labor; bathtub, shower or walk-in tub and wall surround. This promotion cannot be combined with any other offer. Other restrictions may apply. This offer expires 6/30/2023. Each dealership is independently owned and operated. **Third party financing is available for those customers who qualify. See your dealer for details. ©2023 BCI Acrylic Inc.