

How Does Your Garden Grow?...

START WITH THE SOIL

A healthy, flourishing garden begins with healthy soil.

*By learning as much as you can about your soil,
you will be better able to match plants to your conditions.*

- ❁ You can determine the type of soil you have by conducting a simple test. The test will reveal the composition of your soil (whether it's predominantly clay, loam or sand), the nutrient levels in your soil and the soil's pH (its acidity or alkalinity).
- ❁ Scoop a handful of soil and give it a squeeze. If you have sandy soil, it will be crumbly and won't hold its shape in your hand; sandy soils don't retain much moisture. If you have clay soil, it will form a lump when you squeeze it; clay soils get sticky when wet and turn very hard when dry. Loam, the ideal garden soil, will form into a ball when you squeeze it but will break apart easily. To improve any soil – sand, clay or loam – add compost.
- ❁ Another way to determine whether your soil is clay, loam or sand is to put a handful of garden soil in a litre jar, fill it with water, shake and then leave it to settle for a day. Sand will settle to the bottom, silt will be the next layer with clay on top (organic matter will float on the water's surface). Compare the percentage of each layer to determine whether you've got loam (20% clay, 40% silt, 40% sand), clay (60% clay, 30% silt, 10% sand) or sand (5% clay, 10% silt, 85% sand).
- ❁ To test the pH levels in your garden - to tell whether your soil's pH is acidic, neutral or alkaline - a home pH testing kit is available at most nurseries. This will help you determine what plants will do best in your soil conditions.
- ❁ To determine the drainage capacity of your soil, dig a hole 1 foot deep and 1 foot wide. Fill it with water, let it drain completely then fill again until the soil is saturated. Depending on how long it takes for this last batch to drain, you've either got adequate drainage (less than 2 hours) or poor drainage (more than 2 hours).
- ❁ Whatever your soil type, pH, drainage and nutrient levels, you can improve the health of your soil by adding compost. Dig in lots of compost when first preparing your garden bed for planting. In already established gardens, add a 3-inch layer of compost around your plants in spring, summer or fall.

The Composting Council of Canada
Le Conseil canadien du compostage

416-535-0240 (1-877-571-GROW) • www.compost.org