

FROM FARMING TO GARDENING: Bringing Soil Health to Life

Whether you are a farmer with 500 acres or are gardening in the city, Soil is your greatest resource for success. Its health and vitality are essential for healthier food, cleaner water, richer biodiversity and a calmer climate.

*Whether on the farm or in a garden, caring for your soil comes down to six basic principles. These are known as the **6Cs of Soil Health**.*

The 4th C: Cover the Soil

Keeping the soil covered at all times is a fundamental principle of soil health management because it helps protect the soil from erosion, conserves moisture, moderates temperature fluctuations, suppresses weed growth, and provides habitat for beneficial organisms.

As a gardener, it is important to remember:

A bare soil is a vulnerable soil. Keep all soil covered, all year round.

Your soil needs to be protected, so that its environment is not too hot, too cold, too wet, or too dry. Your invisible underground workforce will be as productive as possible when you provide them with a safe environment.

- **The best cover is a growing plant.** Of course, that may not always be possible between plantings, or when your plants are very young and don't cover much area, so check out the options below.
- **You can cover bare soil with plant residues, compost, or organic mulches.** These materials will both protect your soil and feed your critters.
- **You can also use inorganic mulches,** such as stones, crushed rock or brick, or plastic weed-block. These materials don't feed your critters, but they do protect them. These options are often better suited for perennial plants, such as shrubs and trees, than for garden veggies or annual flowers.
- **Some veggie gardeners like to use corrugated cardboard.** You can cover the entire bed, cutting holes where you want to plant seedlings or place seeds. The cardboard protects the soil, keeps weeds at bay, and eventually breaks down and feeds your underground workforce.
- **Don't remove your annual plants in the fall.** If you want to make the garden appear less messy and more attractive, you can cut your plants and leave them on the soil, perhaps mixed with leaves or other organic residues. *Leave the roots in the soil, however: they are feeding your underground workforce!*

To learn what some Canadian farmers are doing to improve the health of their soils, check out the many great interviews at the Compost Council of Canada's YouTube channel.

For more information, visit www.compost.org.



Cover the soil constantly ... one of the 6 C's for Healthy Soil

Canadian Farmers: *Bringing Soil Health to Life*

The 6Cs of Soil Health: Tackling Climate Change with Soil

Soil is an important ally in tackling climate change, as well as achieving productivity and profitability. Paying attention to the health of the soil realizes a rich harvest of benefits: climate stability, improved water quality, drought resistance, cost savings, healthier food, and a generally more profitable enterprise. It all comes down to six basic practices: **the 6Cs of Soil Health**.

1. **Control Compaction**
2. **Cultivate Carefully**
3. **Continuous Living Plants**
4. **Cover the Soil Constantly**
5. **Crop and Animal Diversity**
6. **Compost and other Soil Improvers**



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