

In Your Garden How to Improve Garden Soils

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Soils in North Eastern Illinois are usually heavy, cold and hard to work. The clays which causes this difficulty are the same things that make the soils among the most productive in the world.

But clay soils are touchy and need to be handled right if they are to provide roots of our plants with nutrients, moisture and air.

Soil that has been mistreated becomes hard and crusty when dry, and sticky when wet. Soil in good "tilth" is loose and easy to work, holds water, but is well drained and well aerated too.

The best way to improve the "tilth" of garden soil is to add organic matter and dig it in before planting. Any kind of organic matter is usable. Availability and price are usually the determining factors. When manures were available for the taking they were a good choice. Now-a-days they are expensive.

Shredded leaves are abundant because of burning restrictions. They are composted by many communities and free for the taking. In some areas, sawdust, fine wood chips, corn cobs or similar materials are available. Some of these may extract nitrogen from the soil so you might need to apply a little extra at planting time.

Grass clippings are always available but should be composted before using if treated with weed killers.

Apply a layer of the organic material three to six inches deep over the garden, and spade in as deeply as you can. If you garden in raised beds, you can economize because none of your organic material will be wasted on walkways.

Most gardeners anticipate the need of organic matter each year. Be on the lookout for things such as bags of clippings, leaves in fall, or whatever becomes available. You can add many of these things to your garden as mulch during the season, or start a compost pile so you will always have a supply available.

Nematodes

Nematodes or eelworms are non-segmented worms with cylindrical or spindle-shaped bodies. Most are from 0.5 to 1.5 millimeter long and 40 to 50 times as long as they are broad. There are generally 3 types; i.e., those that live on decaying organic matter, those that feed on small soil inhabiting animals and those that feed on plant roots. They are represented in the following classes:

awl	<i>Dolichodorus</i>
burrowing	<i>Radopholus</i>
cyst	<i>Heterodera</i>
dagger	<i>Xiphinema</i>
lance	<i>Hoplolaimus</i>
lesion	<i>Pratylenchus</i>
pin	<i>Pratylenchus</i>
ring	<i>Criconemoides</i>
root knot	<i>Meloidogyne</i>
sheath	<i>Hemicycliophoro</i>
spiral	<i>Helicotylenchus</i>
sting	<i>Belonolaimus</i>
stubby root	<i>Trichodorus</i>
stunt	<i>Tylenchorhynchus</i>

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