



## Taking care of your garden's soil

Fall is generally the time of year people think about cleaning up in the garden, but it is also a great time to start to get the soil ready for next year. In spite of our recent extreme cold snap, until the soil is frozen, you can still take care of this task. If you have not had a recent soil test, you can take a sample, and bring it to the Extension Office to see if you need to make any amendments prior to next year's growing season. The Douglas County Conservation District provides a grant that can help cover the cost of up to two soil samples for Douglas County homeowners, while funds are available. Fall is a great time particularly for working on changing soil pH, as adding sulfur can lower pH or adding lime can raise it, but both of those take several months for full effect.

Adding organic matter such as dry leaves or compost is also perfect this time of year, as that material has a chance to break down, and incorporate into your garden prior to next year's growing season. There is a limit to how much organic material, such as leaves, can be added in one application. Normally, a layer 2 inches deep is adequate, with 5 to 6 inches being the maximum that

should be added at one time. If you are adding plant debris, shredding those will help speed their breakdown. That organic matter not only provides critical food for soil microorganisms that help plants thrive, and but it also helps improve the soil structure and nutrient holding capability of your soils. If you rely on tilling your garden bed, that is a job that is also usually well-suited for the fall, as the subsequent freeze/thaw cycles of the winter will help mellow the soil for the spring. If you do not take care of these tasks now, it might set you back in the spring, as it is often too wet to get the garden prepared in the spring at desired times. Working your soil when it is wet can destroy its structure so that is definitely something to avoid in the spring or fall.

Finally, keeping bare soil covered with a layer of mulch to protect your garden over the winter can provide benefits of improved soil health and good tilth for spring planting, by sheltering the soil surface from harsh winter winds and heavy precipitation. If you have your garden soil well prepared in the fall, you can get started gardening earlier in the spring. Remember, healthy soil is the key to great gardening.

For more information on soil sampling consult our website:

[https://www.douglas.k-state.edu/crops-livestock/Soil\\_Testing.html](https://www.douglas.k-state.edu/crops-livestock/Soil_Testing.html)