

## Gardening Department

### Using Soil Amendments

Whether you are planting your latest plant find from the nursery or just preparing your beds for mulching, you should amend your soil with a good soil amendment. If you ask the average homeowner, they will describe their soil as pretty good. In actuality, most of the soils in our area are compacted, heavy clay, with little amounts of organic matter. Soil amendments such as compost and humus are made from organic material (previously living) that help aerate compacted soil, improve drainage, act as a storehouse for nutrients, help in root expansion and feed soil microorganisms. Soil amendments can also help your plants grow better and healthier. All great stuff. But you ask yourself, “okay, so how do I add soil amendments and what should I use?”



On larger projects such as when constructing new planting beds or adding a vegetable garden, use a pre-blended soil and compost mix such as Gasper’s organic soil blend (with Soil King leaf mold) or premium organic soil (with Earthmate, a nutrient-rich organic compost). Both are sold in cubic yard amounts, premixed, and can be delivered right to the house. These products should be spread upon the intended area and rototilled into the existing soil to a depth of 6-8 inches. In a raised bed situation, these soil mixes can be used to fill planters.

What type of bagged product should I use? There are many soil amendment products available, and all will be somewhat helpful to your garden. The best will have a diverse source of nutrients to improve your soil. Many people know and use peat moss. Peat moss’ effect is limited, as it decomposes quickly, has no nutrient value, and because of habitat destruction, it’s use is environmentally questionable. It should only be used in small amounts for water retention. A better choice is mushroom soil, organic manure or a compost mix. These are rich in nutrients, longer lasting, and made from recycled agricultural products. At Gasper, we feel the best is Coast of Maine’s Bumper Crop – a diverse mix of nutrient-rich ingredients such as

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### Using Soil Amendments (Continued)

worm casting, manures and seaweed. Bumper Crop will be a reservoir of nutrients that will continuously feed your plants, enrich your soil, and increase disease resistance in your plants. A yearly top-dress around your plants or tilled into vegetable or flower gardens will deliver a “bumper crop” in your garden!

When planting smaller projects such as an additional shrub, tree or flat of flowers, it is easier and more cost efficient to use bagged products. Gasper has many bagged mixes such as Bumper Crop, Mushroom Soil, Organic Manure and Compost. After excavating the soil to prepare a hole for planting, a soil amendment should be added to that soil at a 50/50 ratio. The new combined soil is then backfilled into a hole that is 2x as wide as the plant ball or container. It is also a good idea to add a starter fertilizer such as Espoma Biotone Plant Starter or any Dr. Earth fertilizer at this time. This will greatly speed root development and help speed establishment of your new plant(s).

What about in established beds? Soil amendments can also be used as a top-dress around existing plants by lightly working them into the top few inches of soil with a *Garden Weasel*

