

Soil

Knowing your soil is an important part of choosing the right plant. Every plant will have its own soil preferences in order for you to grow the healthiest plants. Some plants prefer soils that are sandier, while others prefer those with more clay. Your soil can also tell you about how often you have to water your plants because sandy soils will dry out faster than clay soils.

Know Your Soil Type

One of the most important things to know before you plant is your soil type. An easy way to find this is by doing the squeeze test. For this test all you need to do is take a handful of moist soil from your garden and squeeze it. You will find one of three results when you open your hand:

1. The soil will hold its shape, but crumble when lightly poked. This indicates that your soil is a loam.
2. Your soil will hold its shape even when poked. This indicates that your soil is a clay soil.
3. Your soil will fall apart as soon as you open your hand. This indicates that you have a sandy soil.

Knowing your specific type of soil is important because it can tell you a lot about how your soil will respond to water and nutrients. A clay soil will be slow draining and nutrient rich. A sandy soil will be quick draining, but have trouble retaining nutrients and moisture. Finally, a loamy soil will retain moisture and nutrients without staying soggy. In this area the most common soil types are sandy soil, clay soil, loamy clay soil, and silty clay soil.

Having a sandy or a clay soil may make growing certain plants a bit harder, but it doesn't mean its impossible to grow them. To help make it easier for you to grow the plants you want to grow you can amend the soil to increase drainage or its ability to retain moisture.

Know Your Soil Nutrients and pH

Before you plant it is also important to know what nutrients exist in your soil and your soil pH. The most important nutrients for your plant are Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium. Plants use Nitrogen to convert sunlight to energy, Phosphorus for cell division and development of the growing tip, and Potassium helps move sugars and starches and reduce water loss. Being deficient in one of these nutrients can lead to major problems and even death of the plant. Before adding fertilizer, you should test your soil so you are aware of the existing nutrient levels in your soil.

Doing this will allow you to buy a proper fertilizer that only contains the nutrients you need.

While you are testing your soil nutrient levels you should also test your soil pH. This is important because some plants require a lower pH (more acidic) soil to remain healthy and produce the best results. Examples of these plants are blueberries, azaleas and rhododendrons. Having a high or low pH does not mean that you can't grow a plant, it just means that the soil will need to be amended to get the soil to a more ideal pH for the plant. If you need any help figuring out your soil pH or the existing nutrients in your soil you can purchase one of our soil test kits so we can help you figure out what kind of amendments may be necessary for your plants to remain healthy.

Amending Your Soil

Once you know your soil type, nutrient levels, pH, and what you intend to plant you can start looking at amending your soil. At Schalow's Nursery we carry many products that could help you with getting your soil ready for planting. If you find that your soil lacks the necessary nutrients to keep your new plants healthy, we can help you find a fertilizer that will provide the nutrients necessary for your plant. We also carry products for raising and lowering pH. If you have plants like azaleas or blueberries that prefer a more acidic (lower pH) soil you can purchase an acidifier or peat moss. For those that require a more basic (higher pH) soil you could purchase garden lime to raise the pH. The final way we can help you amend your soil is by providing products that can help you improve your soil structure in increase drainage or water retention. Our products for increasing drainage in clay soils include sand and mushroom compost. Using mushroom compost will also help with improving soil ecology by increasing organic matter content. For increasing water retention in sandy soils, you can use products like peat moss and vermiculite.