

Hort Short

Snohomish County Master Gardener Organic Soil Amendments

Issue# 3_2021

Organic Soil Amendments — Enrich your Soil

Amending your soil is the one job you can do that will most likely save you time and money.

What are soil amendments?

- Compost is the most commonly known soil amendment.
- Biosolids-blends are another type of organic soil amendment.

Why amend the soil?

- Helps loosen soil.
- Improves water infiltration.
- Can increase long-term nutrient supply.
- When added to sandy soils, organic soil amendments can also improve water-holding capacity.
- Soils with low organic matter content benefit the most from addition of an amendment.

How much should be added?

- First check if any is needed by conducting a soil test that includes organic matter analysis.
- If the soil test indicates organic matter is needed:
 - For new garden or landscape plantings, add 1 to 3 inches of organic soil amendment and incorporate to a depth of at least 6 inches.
 - If your soil lacks organic matter, add 2 or 3 inches of amendment.
 - If a laboratory soil test shows excessive levels of phosphorus (P) in your soil, reduce or eliminate amendment applications.
- If the soil test indicates organic matter is not needed do not add any.
- When planting new plants, add amendments to the planting hole and the entire planting bed.
- Established gardens require less organic soil amendments — typically about ½ inch per year.
 - This can be reduced by letting leaves remain on the beds until Spring.
- Raised beds may need a yearly addition of soil mix or organic amendment to replace volume loss of soil.
- For new lawns, 1 inch of compost can be incorporated to a depth of 5 to 6 inches.
- For established lawns, if the soil is of poor quality, add a ½ inch of amendment and aerate the lawn to mix it in.
- Don't over-amend. Over-amending soil can:
 - Add excessive phosphorus, which then runs off into and pollutes waterways.
 - You can see a decline in benefits decline.
 - Too much organic matter, on lawns, can retain excessive water and damage the lawn.
 - Can result in salt accumulation in arid areas (usually not a problem in western Washington).
 - Waste money on something you don't need.

Resources:

Organic soil amendments in yards and gardens: How much is enough? (Home Garden Series) [WSU Extension Publications](#) | [Organic soil amendments in yards and gardens: How much is enough? \(Home Garden Series\)](#)

Snohomish County Natural Yard Care. [Natural Yard Care | Snohomish County, WA - Official Website \(snohomishcountywa.gov\)](#)

LC – 10_2020