



Perennial and Rose Gardening Newsletter

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Things to remember:

1. *Earthworms help improve the overall healthiness of your soil.*
2. *Fish Emulsion and Mills Magic Mix can help sustain earthworm production.*
3. *Maintain an annual program of adding organics of some type to your soil.*
4. *A soil made-up of near 100% organics can be a bad thing.*

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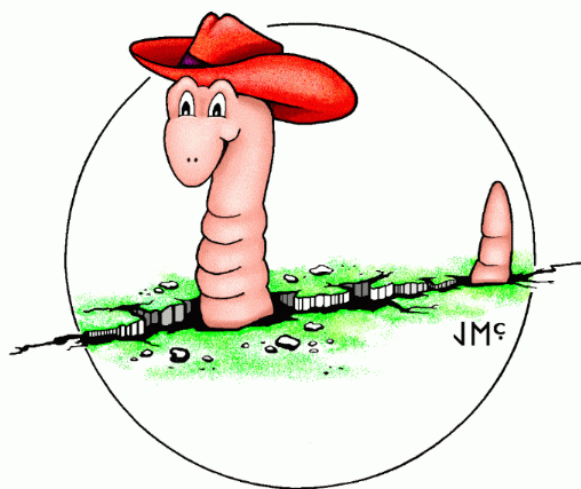
Soil – What’s below the soil line is more important than what’s above!

Have you ever brought home that new lush green plant, dug a hole and planted it only to find less than superior results in the days and weeks ahead. I have and it’s not an exciting time to say the least . . . it’s downright disappointing. Having discovered the dos and don’ts of gardening through the school of hard knocks I cannot express enough—it’s what’s below the soil line that’s important. Everything else will follow with the results you desire.

I’m no expert on soil composition, chemistry and the like, but I can share a few of my experiences that have netted achieving my best expectations.

Organics and Soil Amendments

Amending less than adequate soils, especially those soils heavy in clay can do wonders for your thumb—it can turn it a dark shade of green. Twice per year I pull out my bag of Mills Magic Mix (millsmix.com). In early spring or late fall (i.e. February or March for Louisiana). I pull back the pine straw, sprinkle about 2 to 3 cups of product around the drip line of the plants and work the mix into the top layer of the soil and finally replace the straw. Since this is organic and includes ingredients such as alfalfa meal, activated sludge, fish meal and steamed bone meal it takes some time in order for the product to break down into useful nutrients for plants. Thus why I begin adding it to the soil in early spring or late fall. Another hugely benefit of my using this product is WORMS! Yes, worms! I have never seen more earth worms as I have seen after the start of using this organic product. Earth worms are a wonderful beneficial organism that helps aerate the soil by tunneling in and through the soil helping break down heavy soils in the process. A byproduct of earthworms is castings or the manure of the earthworms. They form a rich humus which in and of itself helps



improve the soil in which your plants live and breathe.

Another product I use bi-weekly is Fish Emulsion. Granted, even the deodorized formulations still have a less than pleasant odor, I still feel fish emulsion applied to the soil or drip lines of your perennial and rose plants help promote earthworm production and thus healthy soils. Many generations before mine have discovered the use of fish buried in and around plants, which during the decay process help provide nutrients and organic soil conditioning.

Can you have too much organic material in your soil?

I think you can have too much organic matter. Is it likely . . . NO! However, in my own experiences when building my beds I used about three-fourths organic material and the remainder was my own heavy clay soil. After some time I realized that the almost purely organic matter resulted in soil that was extremely airy and contained little to nothing to bind it together. When picked up and squeezed in your hands it wouldn't hold shape by any measure. In addition, being in the deep south the plants were requiring water on a nearly daily basis during the dog days of summer. In hindsight, had I included more topsoil and amendments with the organic material that were heavier in particle size would have helped "bind" the soil particles together and maintain more moisture, etc. Don't get me wrong . . . the plants did well, but it simply required more maintenance (i.e. watering requirements). So I do think too much of a good thing can be detrimental, but very unlikely. Thus, I try and maintain a ratio of 1:1:1 (organics, sand and soil/topsoil) or one-third each.



Photo: This is what a healthy soil should look like – plenty of organic material.