



The Overwhelming Garden: Part 2

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Step 3: Prepare your soil. It's like making a loaf of bread!

I love fresh baked bread! I grew up with my family's bakery in Bridgeport, CA and there is nothing better than that smell early in the morning. Making bread is not easy though. It requires a lot of work but the work you put in beforehand is worth it when you take a hot loaf out of your oven. Same concept is applied to gardening. The work you put in up front is rewarded when you get to the harvest stage. One of the most important steps is getting your soil right before you plant.

There are some soil types that require very little work and other's that require amending and everything short of a miracle to grow anything other than weeds. Fertile valley soils or 'loamy' soils are like the simple loaves of bread. The consistency is not too sticky, not too sandy, it's just right! The recipe is simple and easy to follow and you really start off with a good base. When you push your shovel into the soil, it does not refuse to go in. What you add to it might be something to help balance out the nutrients plants require. In a relatively short amount of time you can be ready to plant.

Then there are the soils that require the works: the list of ingredients is long, the number of steps is longer, and you have to knead it for it to work. One type doesn't drain, the other one doesn't retain enough moisture. The good thing is that there are options to dealing with these soil types. There is also a lot of dispute about the best way to address the problems. My best advice? Ask around. Go to your favorite local nursery and ask what other people in the area are doing. You might decide that raised beds are going to be the only way you'll start your garden this year. Or you might decide that you want to amend the soil you have.

Just remember that amending soil is an art. Back to the bread example: White breads require less kneading than wheat breads. Kneading too little makes the bread dense and tough. Knead it too much and you'll have it rising up out of the bowl and out the front door. Add too much flour and it's tough. Did you remember the yeast? Did you fold the dough or punch it? Making bread has become such an art that most of us leave it up to the grocery store every week.

It's intimidating to most of us, just as the idea of planting a garden in 'poor' soil is and many people end up

leaving it to the experts?. There are several different methods of amending your soil and some people say you shouldn't amend your soil regardless of what you want to grow. The more you mess with the soil, the more you break into your soil's structure and end up having to build it back up again.

But don't get lost in all of the different theories. Get a real, no kidding, garden guru to talk to at the nursery where you are picking up your soil, let them know exactly what you are planting, what you are starting with and stay and chat for awhile. The real green thumbs love to share the dirt with you and will take the time to help you choose something that will work with your plans. It's amazing the amount of information one good gardener will impart to another over a cup of coffee J

So, for the Instant Gratification Gardener, prepping your soil probably involves a bag or two of garden soil at the nursery, a few containers, or maybe a quick raised bed. For the Weekend Gardener, you may want to invest in a little more prep time. You might be converting a portion of your lawn, adding some raised beds, or trying to turn your desert or clay soil plot into a viable little garden. Priapos, you will be undoubtedly testing your soil, adding macronutrients, micronutrients, compost from your own compost pile, and all the things a god of gardening would be expected to do.

No matter which Gardener you are, be prepared to try a few different things and don't be surprised if one or two of them don't work out the way you planned. Gardening is a science experiment that we can all take part in! And remember what it is that you are preparing for. Picking produce from your own garden is even more rewarding than getting a whiff of that fresh baked loaf of bread in your oven.

For those of you who live in an area with fertile, beautiful soil?I'm jealous! My soil is red clay that sticks to the bottom of your shoes when it gets wet. There were times this spring when I had a three inch heel of red clay added to my boots. As for me, I have always wanted a large backyard garden. I have these memories of my great grandmother's garden in Smith Valley. Her garden seemed endless and nothing was better than pulling up a carrot, rinsing it off in the faucet, and having an afternoon snack.

When I moved here all I saw was a gigantic garden in the back. It was actually a bare bone, cracked, hard clay slab that had been compacted by the horses that the previous owner had kept. My gigantic science experiment has been adding some soil conditioner, someone recommended gypsum once so I added some of that, compost bed in the far corner, bone meal for certain beds, and really just seeing what happens over time as I am adding things to the clay soil, trying to loosen it up. I'm getting ready to test my soil again to see what nutrients I've added too much of or not enough of. I add something, take note of it, and see what happens! Personally, I can't wait for that first large zucchini that I can use for my zucchini bread. Bread in the oven and vegetables fresh from the garden?Paradise!

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