

## **Adding Organic Matter**

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As the weather warms up, we get eager to get in the garden. My sons Cooper, Casey and I have been making a list of things we are going to put in the garden this spring, I Love this time of year. We have many things we can do to improve our garden, let's talk about Applying Organic Matter in the spring.

Organic matter improves just about any soil. It acts as a sponge in sandy soils and helps hold water and nutrients. In clay soils, it builds structure, increases friability, increases aeration and improves the water infiltration rate.

We normally encourage gardeners to add organic matter in the fall because of increased availability of many sources of organic matter and the option of adding organic material that is not fully decomposed. Adding organic matter in the spring is fine, but needs to be done more carefully. Be sure any material you use will not burn plants. For example, rotten silage may not have broken down enough over the winter and may release fumes that burn plants. If you can detect an ammonia odor from any material, it is too fresh to use. Good sources of organic matter for spring use would include peat moss, finished compost and well-rotted leaf mold.

The next question is how much to add? The short answer is to add 2 inches of low nitrogen materials such as peat moss or leaf mold to the surface of the soil, and then till as deeply as possible. If using compost or other nutrient rich material, add only one-half inch to the surface before tilling. Too much fertility can result in plants that produce lots of foliage but little fruit.

Actually, it might be helpful to till as deeply as possible before adding the organic material, add the organic matter, and then till again. This gives a couple of extra inches of prepared soil. Just be sure not to till too much. If the soil ends up looking like flour, the structure of the soil has been destroyed. A well-prepared soil should have particles about the size of grapenuts or a bit larger.

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