

Beginning Gardening Part 2

If you haven't had a garden in awhile, or are new to growing your own food, there are some basics to cover to ensure your success. In my last article, I talked about the need for 10 hours of sun and knowing the nutrient content of your soil by doing a soil test. In this article, I'll cover building the soil and tilling it.

The results of your soil test will give you specific instructions on what to fertilize your garden with. The lab results will also tell you the soil ph (acidity). Soils in Pickens County are normally very acidic, and most all new garden sites need significant amounts of lime to neutralize this acidity. Why is ph so important?

When soils are low in ph, the nutrients (fertilizer) that you apply to the soil are held very tightly to the soil particles. This makes it difficult for the plant roots to get them, and the plant ends up growing poorly. Insects and diseases then begin their invasion, and the garden ends up being a big disappointment. Our soil test gives you the exact amount lime your soil needs to correct your specific low ph problem. Most of the homeowner kits you buy at the store just guess at the amount of lime you need to add.

Use dolomite limestone to correct your ph problem. This is the type of lime that is mined in Whitestone, which is in the northern part of our county. You can use the pelletized version or the white powder—it's the same thing. The pelletized is less dusty; it's just a convenience thing you pay a little extra for.

Mix the right amount of lime in the soil 8 inches deep. This is where your roots will be picking up nutrients and water. The way limestone is ground causes some of it to work quickly and some of it to work over time. Apply lime as soon as you can to your soil. If the soil is wet, go ahead and spread it! Let it sit on top of the soil and dissolve. Plow it in when the soil is dry.

Do not plow or till wet soil! When we talk about soil, you have to remember that there is a chemical and biological process going on under your feet. Plowing or tilling wet clay soil compacts the particles together, removes air, and in short, turns it into a concrete look a like. Be patient! You will have your opportunity to work the soil before planting.

There is an easy method to determine if soil is too wet to plow. Grab a handful of soil, reaching 2-3 inches down. Squeeze it in your hand (not too hard). If it falls apart it's ok to till, if it doesn't, wait.

Next week we'll get into fertilizers, and more on tilling. Until then feel free to contact us at the depot at 706-253-8840.