

Soil Preparation & Planning

Guideline 6

Did you know: If you take the time to plant native or adapted plants and properly prepare your soil, it will reduce water use, save you money and reduce the time you spend on lawn & garden maintenance.

What kind of soil do you have?

Contact your local conservation district to test your soil or perform the following test for an estimate.

When the soil is moist, pick up a handful and squeeze it tightly in your hand. Next, try to pinch the soil into a ribbon.

1. If the soil forms a ribbon up to 2" long, you have a clay soil.
2. If the soil forms a ribbon only 1" long, you have a loam soil.
3. If the soil falls apart easily and won't make a ribbon, then you have a sandy soil.

Add 1" to 2" organic matter as a surface mulch to improve overall soil quality. Plants will be healthier because the soil holds more nutrients and water. Plants will require less water and you will save water and money.

Organic matter is available in many forms (compost, leaf mold, bark, wood chips, aged manure, shredded leaves, etc.) and may be found at your local nursery or home & garden center.

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Seven steps to a water efficient yard and garden

1. **PLAN FIRST, PLANT SECOND.** Draw a scale picture of your home and yard. Consult a professional landscape architect, master gardener, or local nursery for advice. This will allow you to implement water efficient yard & garden principles that will save you time and money.
2. **SMALLER LAWNS.** Lawns are the largest water user in most yards. Before planting, contact your local nursery to determine the proper variety of grass to use. Only plant lawns where they are truly needed (i.e., play areas).
3. **SOIL IMPROVEMENT.** Determine your soil type and nutrient needs. Adding organic matter will improve overall soil quality and reduce water and fertilizer needs.
4. **WATER WISELY.** Use efficient watering systems such as sprinklers for grass and drip, spray, or bubble delivery systems for shrubs and ground covers. Make sure your irrigation system is adjusted for seasonal differences in water demand and that it is working properly.
5. **USE MULCH.** Placing mulch over the soil will help cool the soil, reduce weed growth, slow erosion, and minimize water evaporation.
6. **RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE.** Contact your local nursery, master gardener, or home improvement center for information on low water using and drought resistant plants appropriate to our climate. Plants with similar water needs should be placed together to maximize water efficiency and to minimize cost. Once established, they will use less water.
7. **MAINTENANCE.** Regularly weed your yard & garden since weeds compete for the same water that your grass & plants use. Regular maintenance will keep your water bill low and also save you time.

More Information

360-236-3100 • 1-800-521-0323
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/>

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