Healthy Soil

It’s all about the dirt! Your plants will be as healthy as you soil is healthy. It all starts there. Healthy soil is alive, has good water retention and can hold all the nutrients that your plants need to grow.

The best tool for creating healthy, living soil is to add healthy, living compost!

Where to get good compost?
1. Your own backyard or worm bin
2. Reputable local distributors who can provide tests of the quality of their product
3. Private listings from local farms (See our list for recommended local distributors in Metro Vancouver)

How to use compost?
1. Dig it into your soil in the spring prior to planting
2. Place it on top of the soil around already growing plants
3. Add it to your soil in the fall and make sure you cover your soil with a thick layer of leaves for winter

Soil is alive?
1 teaspoon of healthy garden soil contains over one billion bacteria, strings of beneficial fungi several yards long, and thousands of small one-celled creatures called protozoa. These microscopic creatures are the foundation of the Soil Food Web. All the bigger creatures we see in the soil, like earthworms, depend on these microbes. A healthy garden can have up to 50 earthworms in one square foot of soil!

Living Soil will...
1. Create and maintain soil structure, with the right amount of air and water for healthy plant roots
2. Produce and hold onto nutrients in the most available form for your plants to absorb
3. Control disease – the good guys out compete the bad guys!

Signs that your soil is healthy
1. You see lots of earthworms
2. Water is absorbed quickly and the soil doesn’t dry out too fast
3. Your plants grow quickly and are somewhat resistant to disease
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Common Soil Problem #1
Plants are stunted, eaten by pests, yellow leaves = Soil fertility is too low!

Solution
1. Make sure there is not a lot of woody debris in your soil *If possible – screen out larger woody debris with 1/4 inch screen
2. Add nutrient sources rich in nitrogen throughout the growing season, through natural fertilizers, such as:
   - Seaweed (fresh or dried)
   - Organic composted manures (dairy cow, poultry, horse)
   - Complete, slow release organic fertilizers
   - Liquid fish fertilizer
   - Liquid kelp fertilizer

Common Soil Problem #2
Water pools on the surface, soil is compacted and heavy = no room for plant roots!

Solution
1. Always protect your soil over the winter by planting a cover crop or mulching thickly with dead leaves, straw or burlap. Never leave your soil uncovered in the winter rains!
2. Bring life back to your soil by digging in lots of healthy compost and covering the soil in the summer, once plants are established. Green grass clippings are a great summer mulch to protect the surface of the soil and to add nutrients!

Excellent soil ecology resources to learn more
