

Desert Soil Preparation for Vegetables, Herbs & Annual Flowers



Simple Steps for 'in ground' beds:

1. Locate your garden where it will receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight. Afternoon shade is perfect.
2. The width of your beds should be only as wide as you can easily reach. Three feet is good unless you can access the bed from both sides.
3. Soil preparation is critical! There is no need to purchase garden soil. You can mix your own on site.
 - a. Before planting use a sprinkler or hose moisten your garden area thoroughly. Wait several days for the soil to dry to the point where it doesn't stick to your shovel. It should be moist but not saturated.
4. Turn the soil to a depth of 6 – 8 inches with a shovel or rototiller.
5. Add 4-6 inches of organic mulch or compost.
6. In heavy clay soils, add 3 inches of coarse sand.
7. Turn the soil again, blending these layers. When you are finished you should have about 12 inches of prepared garden soil.
8. Vegetables are heavy feeders and need nitrogen, which is essentially absent in our soil, and also phosphorus, which may need to be added at this time.
9. Rake until smooth. Avoid walking on the finished soil as it will compress or compact it. Use boards or plywood if necessary.
10. Install irrigation lines. See handout (Drip Irrigation for Vegetable Beds) for details. The one-quarter inch tubing with emitters embedded in the tubing work great and deliver ½ gallon of water per hour. This allows you to water for 10 – 20 minutes and apply enough water to the plants.
11. Plant your garden. By installing plants or seeds next to the irrigation lines where they will receive water and not dry out.
12. After seeds have sprouted, apply a 2-3 inch layer of organic mulch to insulate the soil, slow evaporation and keep weeds to a minimum.

Note: You will need to apply 3-4 inches of organic mulch every year because this material decomposes very rapidly in our alkaline soils.

Container Gardening Soil Preparation

The soil mixture for containers is very different. Soils in containers do not behave the same as soil in the ground. Growing media, potting mixes and soil-less mixes are usually made up of different organic ingredients as well as mineral ingredients and are typically lightweight and weed and disease free .

For best results, use a mixture of 1/3 pre-prepared garden 'soil' mix available from your local nursery or home improvement store, 1/3 part peat moss, and 1/3 part perlite, vermiculite or pumice.

Peat moss is used as a bulking agent and carbon source as the tendency to absorb water to its self. Dunk peat moss in a bucket of water to soak it before mixing into your container mix.

Perlite, pumice and vermiculite are lightweight, will hold water and help with soil aeration.