

HERBACEOUS PERENNIAL BED PREPARATION

- 1) Test the Soil
- 2) Weed the Bed
- 3) Create Well-Draining Soil
- 4) Ensure Sufficient Organic Matter
- 5) Fertilize

1) Test the Soil:

- pH
 - Minimum standards: 5.5-6.5 (for most perennials)
- Organic matter (also an indicator of nitrogen needs)
 - Minimum standards: 5%
- Phosphate
 - Minimum standards: 50lbs available/Acre
- Potash (soil test report will help you)
 - Minimum standards: 120lbs available/Acre

Perennials that prefer **Acidic Soil**: add sulfur or aluminum sulphate

- Arctostaphylos
- Asclepias tuberosa
- Astilbe
- Baptisia
- Irises
- Phlox paniculata

Perennials that prefer **Alkaline Soil**: add lime (which grade?)

- Centranthus
- Delphinium
- Dianthus
- Gray-foliaged plants
- Gypsophila
- Lavender

2) Weed the Bed (Especially Perennial Weeds):

You will pay later for taking the easy way out now!

- Glyphosate "Round Up"
 - Preferably use several times
 - Spray then work up
 - Let weeds come up and spray again
- Eptam: soil incorporate to treat soil before planting
- Cover with black plastic, tarp, old carpet or newspapers
 - Plan on covering for 6 weeks
 - Only works well in sun
- Cultivation or cultivation/cover crops
 - Only works if you have patience and know what to do
- Bring in "weed free" topsoil
 - Good luck! It is possible to find topsoil that is essentially free of quackgrass and some other perennial weeds
- Continually double-dig and fork through your bed before planting. Hand-pull every sprig of weed that pops up (either before or after you put your garden plants in.) Pulling errant weeds is an essential habit for any gardener.
- Pre-emergent herbicide after planting
 - Such as corn gluten

3) Create Well-Draining Soil:

- Amend with Organic Matter (4 inches of organic matter per 12 inches of soil)
- Raised Beds
- Add Sand
 - Usually not a good idea
 - Sand + clay in the right proportions = "concrete"
- Drainage Tile
 - Few resort to this

4) Ensure Sufficient Organic Matter:

- It is best to keep adding each year - even after bed is established
- Variety is the spice of an amended soil's life!
 - Leaf Humus
 - Sphagnum Peat Moss
 - Mushroom Compost
 - Wood Products
 - Composted Aged Manure
 - Compost

5) Fertilize:

- In most cases apply in spring
- All plants take up the same fertilizer salts regardless of where they come from, a factory or a manure pile.
- However, organic fertilizers help the health of the soil beyond just providing fertilizer salts to the plant.
- Hardware Store 10-10-10 is ok...just that - ok (not great)
- We like Osmocote-type products (controlled release fertilizer)
- Milorganite is good and helps keep the deer away - and some people too
- Consider organics like cottonseed meal
- In 95% of cases incorporate potash (Muriate of Potash)