



# LOOKING AFTER *your garden* IN PERTH

## Drought Proofing Perth Soil

To reduce the watering requirements of your plants you need to look beyond the green stuff and down to the brown stuff. Drought tolerant soil is crumbly, well drained and biologically active with a decent layer of slowly decaying mulch. Improving the health of your soil means that you will use less water, save time and money, require fewer chemicals and produce amazing looking plants.

### **Sandy Soils**

Sandy Soils have limited water holding capacity and can be water repellent. This makes watering and fertilising inefficient and can be harmful to the environment. Nutrients are not held in the soil for plants to use but leach into our delicate waterways.

Adding plenty of organic matter such as aged manure, compost and soil improvers helps improve the soil structure, water and nutrient retention and provides energy for the beneficial organisms in the soil that support plant life.

Water repellent sand is common in Perth, in particular the grey “Bassendean” sand. Water just runs off the surface and moisture isn’t held around the roots of the plant. Soil wetters are a temporary solution, however, the best thing to do is change the structure of the soil.

Clay based products, such as Soil Solver, increase nutrient retention, improve water penetration and give your sandy some ‘guts’. Best of all, if applied correctly, this is a one off application!

Use an application of Soil Solver then regular applications of manures (we particularly like cow), composts and soil improvers, to transform sand into beautiful garden soil. Don’t forget a good layer of good quality mulch and don’t let your soil dry out!

### **Clay Soils**

Clay soils are heavy to dig and suffer from lack of aeration, on the plus side they have good (sometimes too good!) water holding capacity and excellent nutrient retention.

Improving clay soil is about improving aeration and reducing compaction. Add plenty of organic matter to open up the soil structure. This allows water to penetrate the hard cap that forms when dry and drainage when wet. Gypsum can be used on some clay-based soils to improve structure. Unsure if gypsum should be used in your clay soil? There is a simple test that can be performed to find out, instructions for this can be found here. (<http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/factsheets/clay-soil-test/9427004>)

If your clay soil is very heavy and is prone to flooding during winter, plants will need to go into raised garden beds or be grown in mounds of well-draining soil so that the main root ball is not sodden.

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## Drought Proofing Perth Soil continued

### **Dig it in!**

To make a lasting improvement, you need to get all this good stuff down into the root zone (about 40cm deep) and evenly distributed. The best time to do this is before planting your plant or tree.

With an established garden, try to dig or fork through the organic matter without too much disturbance to the plant's roots. While you're digging, now is a good time to get some nutrients in. Add some mineral rock dust and any pH amendments you may need.

### **Mulch, Mulch, Mulch**

Mulch softens the soil and improves aeration, encourages earthworms, protects soil from evaporation and frost, smothers weeds, conserves moisture and makes your garden look neat and tidy.

Use compost, manure, rotted leaf litter and lupin mulch. Water in well and remember to leave a few centimetres around the trunks of trees and stems of plants for air circulation and to prevent fungal problems.

Remember that improving the soil takes time and patience. The change won't happen overnight, but it will happen. And, that's one of the beauties of a garden – its wonderful ability to make us slow down.

*General advice only. Please ask one of our Horticulturists if you require specific advice for your situation.*