

# 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 reduces water use, saves money, and reduces time spent on lawn and 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 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 **clay** soil.
2. If the soil forms a ribbon only 1" long, you have **loam** soil.
3. If the soil falls apart easily and won't make a ribbon, then you have **sandy** soil.

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



## 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 allows you to implement water efficient yard and garden principles that 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 proper grass variety 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 improves overall soil quality and reduces 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 works properly.
- 5. USE MULCH.** Placing mulch over the soil helps cool the soil, reduces weed growth, slows erosion, and minimizes 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. Place plants with similar water needs together to maximize water efficiency and minimize cost. Once established, they'll use less water.

**MAINTENANCE.** Regularly weed your yard and garden since weeds compete for the same water that your grass and plants use. Regular maintenance keeps your water bill low and saves you time.

### More Information

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