

The 6 C's for Healthy Soils

Understanding the critical nature of healthy soil is becoming increasingly important. After all, healthy soils are the foundation of a healthy planet including a healthy climate, healthy plants and animals and healthy people. Everything is linked and dependent on healthy soils. Growing the protein, the fruit and vegetables, the crops and the forests – it all starts with healthy soils.

Your lawn and garden are important allies in tackling climate change. It all starts with healthy soils. When you pay attention to the health of your soil, you will realise a harvest of many benefits: climate stability, improved water quality, drought resistance, cost savings, healthier food, and a lush and beautiful landscape. It all comes down to six basic practices: the 6Cs of Soil Health.

Practice 1 - Control Compaction

Watch where you walk.

Use dedicated pathways in gardens and stay off the growing areas, especially when they are wet. Compacted soil is damaged soil.

Practice 2 - Cultivate Carefully

Soils are living ecosystems, teeming with tiny, mostly invisible life forms (soil microorganisms) that support plant growth and health. These soil microorganisms are friendly and important underground partners in the work of building healthy soil. Digging, roto-tilling and other forms of major soil disturbance destroy the underground network of the soil microorganisms. This changes their focus. Instead of helping your plants grow large and healthy, the soil microorganisms must spend their energy rebuilding their communities. Be careful – minimise soil disturbance.

Practice 3 - Continuous living plants

Plants feed soils, just as soils feed plants. Living roots secrete carbon-rich materials (e.g., sugars) into the soil, attracting and feeding multitudes of beneficial soil microorganisms. The larger and more diverse the population of these soil microorganisms, the healthier the soil and the happier the plants. A soil that contains no live roots is a hungry soil – keep the soil microorganisms well fed.

Practice 4 - Cover the Soil Constantly

Our changing climate can be harsh and unpredictable. You never want bare soil, exposed to the elements. Too much or too little water, extreme heat or cold and high winds can cause a lot of harm to soil. Blanket the soil with mulch, compost and/or living plants. This will help keep the soil cooler in summer, warmer in winter and at a good moisture level all of the time.

Practice 5 - Crop, Plant & Animal Diversity

Your lawn and gardens are complex, teeming with different forms of life, all of which work together to keep the soil healthy. Practice diversity (e.g., planting a wide variety of species, rotating vegetable crops) and you will ensure your soil is resilient and thriving with many forms of beneficial life.

Practice 6 - Compost & Soil Improvers

Adding compost to your lawn and garden is one of the easiest ways to improve soil health. Compost feeds the soil microorganisms and helps them to build better soil structure, deliver important soil nutrients to plant roots, help fight off diseases and create a generally better balanced soil ecosystem. For you, this means more readily available nutrients and water for your plants with fewer pests and less disease.

