BELLEVUE NURSERY

GARDENING BASICS - Amendments

Bellevue Nursery believes that good gardening begins with the soil. Here are some general descriptions of planting mediums to increase your gardening success.

Amendments are additions to your garden/growing medium which alter the physical, chemical, and/or biological properties of the soil. You can use organic (e.g. Compost, peat moss), or inorganic (e.g. Gravel, perlite, gypsum) material to amend your soil depending on your goal; e.g. water retention, drainage, aeration, enrichment, etc. Vegetable beds benefit from regular soil amendment to a depth of 6-12".

Compost is an ideal soil amendment. It is a combination of various plant and animal (organic) materials such as manure, peat moss, fir bark fines, oyster shell, etc. that are thoroughly blended and decomposed. In addition to increasing the soil's moisture/ nutrient holding capacity, **compost** promotes the activity of earthworms and beneficial soil microorganisms. There are many resources available about backyard composting. Check out the WSU extension office for lots of good information.

Mulch is material that is typically applied on top of the soil around plants in order to:

- moderate soil temperatures (keep cooler in summer and warmer in winter)
- enrich the soil
- prevent soil erosion, compaction, runoff
- conserve moisture
- suppress weeds
- dress up the garden

Large particle mulch, such as straw, stone, bark nuggets, nut shells, and pine needles, are often used to suppress weeds or to offer winter protection. They are usually removed after they have served their purpose. Organic **compost** can be used as a mulch any time of the year. Compost eventually breaks down and works its way into the soil, adding nutrients as it decomposes and encouraging earthworm and biological activity.

Mulch or Amendment?

Although both amendments and mulch may be made of the same materials, *the difference is that amendments are for mixing into the soil and then decomposing. Mulch is for laying on top of soil and decomposing slowly, if at all.*