

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson
OSU Master Gardener



Even on this stormy November Easter it's GREAT to see the flowers coming out. Only in early spring are there a few: current, cherry, plum, dogwood(!) in the vast greenness of the forest.

That would be why we plant stuff. That, and folks don't seem to understand that, whether you plant stuff or not, you WILL have to get RID of large quantities of plant stuff every year on even the smallest piece of earth. The daffodils I planted by the road are

a splendid display. Cheery bright yellow, a delightful contrast to our cold, gray weather.

My lawn project is nearly completed! At least the work is done. Now I wait to see how much of the grass seed I bought survives. I spent two weekends raking and scoring the areas where I used Roundup to eliminate noxious weeds. After broadcasting seed all over, I raked a thin layer of peat moss on top of the seed. Sometimes when you plant stuff you just feel right about it and know that it will grow. Well this felt RIGHT! Planting grass seed in the gentle mist. The grass is up, thousands of tiny green needles, almost too tiny to see. The trick will be to keep the rest of the lawn mowed without tearing up the new grass. Oh, and to keep the dog off it.

It's still way too early to do much outside except plant grass or move stuff around. We could still have a frost cold enough to kill tender annuals until the early part of MAY. Don't buy plants that you be heartbroken to lose. Pansys and primroses will probably be okay, if you simply must have a bit of color. In fact, yesterday I was at WinCo where I succumbed to some nice container plants for \$1.98 each. I passed on the chartreuse sweet potatoes, which undoubtedly went from the greenhouse to the WinCo entry rack, frost-bitten but still green.

This tempting time of year, when you just want to buy all those colorful annuals, is perhaps a good time to consider dirt. Specifically, your dirt. It's fairly easy to find out approximately what kind of soil you have, or to see how your improvements have affected your soil. Just make yourself a couple of Soil Shakes (See figure 1). Fill a quart-sized jar (think Mason) two-thirds with water and one-third with soil. Shake for five minutes. Set on a window sill, or some place you can see the layers that will form clearly and DO NOT DISTURB. After 40 seconds, mark the level of the first layer of stuff in the bottom of the jar. Wait 30 minutes and mark the second layer, wait 24 hours and mark the top of the final layer. Measure the total depth of solid material in the bottom of your jar. At this point, you can just observe the proportions or you can figure out the percentages and consult a chart to determine the basic soil class.

The bottom layer in your Soil Shake is Sand, the next is Silt, and the top layer is Clay. Floating on top of the water will be organic matter. For each soil layer, divide the depth of the layer by the total depth of the soil in the bottom of the jar to get a percentage. With these percentages, you can reference a soil triangle (See figure 2), where the percentage of sand, clay and silt are laid out to determine the basic soil class. Loam, that gold all gardeners seek, has from 8 – 27% Clay, 72 – 93% Silt and 45 – 55% Sand. Loam, which is really good stuff, is great soil because all of its parts (clay, sand and silt) have equal effects in producing soil structure and porosity.

Large particles, like sand and silt, create relatively large spaces within the soil, while the spaces in soil that is predominately clay will be vanishingly small. This is what causes sandy soils to drain quickly and need constant irrigation. In contrast, the heavy clay soil common in our area has little capacity to drain and therefore takes forever to get dry. Clay soils require care in watering so that the water doesn't go running off the edge. Quoting from the Master Gardeners giant book, "Good structure is especially important in fine- to medium-textures oils, because it increases the soils" ability to accept water and to drain water.

The best way to 'correct' or improve your soil is to add organic matter (the stuff we don't measure in the Soil Shake). All soils will benefit from the addition of 2-4 inches of organic matter per year.

It's not as hard to do as you might think, when you mulch to retain water in the summer and have leaves to get rid of in the fall. Remember; much as we gardeners curse the clay for being slow to dry in spring and turning hard as rock in the summer, that's where the plant nutrients are. So, clay is GOOD.

Another hint, for those of you who rototill, the soil is dry enough to till when it crumbles in your hand. If you can shape the soil in your hand and it holds together, it's too wet to till. If you till when the soil is too wet, you will damage the structure and create a compaction layer at the depth of your tiller tines that plants will have great difficulty growing through. This is the same reason that those who have taken the Master Gardener class never puts small rocks or gravel in the bottom of their potted plants 'to improve drainage'.

Any difference in soil texture, as between the soil and the gravel in the bottom of the pot, creates an interface. These interfaces act as barriers to both root growth and the movement of water. The bottom of the soil layer holds a certain amount of water, determined by the size of the soil pores, regardless of whether it is at the bottom of the pot or on top of a layer of gravel. If you want deeper soil for a planted pot, you have to use a deeper pot. The lesson here is to not create interfaces. You can improve soil, by adding organic matter or gravel, but you have to mix it in. An alternative is to make your layers in the fall (this is the premise behind Lasagna Gardening), and let the worms and other organisms do the work for you over the winter. That same instructor said, "It's a wonder that soil holds still with 16,000 living beings supporting you."

So, make yourself a couple of Soil Shakes. I'm going to make at least two. One from the garden and another from 'unimproved soil', just to see what effects we've had. (I never did it when I was in class, despite the urging of one of my favorite instructors.) Plan exciting color combinations for your summer containers. Select disease resistant varieties and then try to find them!

Good Luck! Happy gardening! And may we all learn to make chili as good as Dirk's.

Figure 1

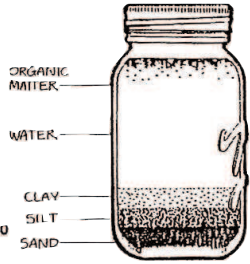
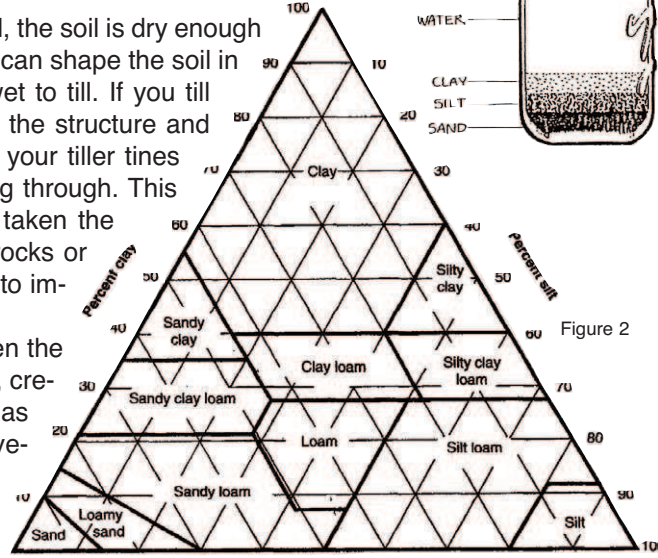


Figure 2



Mother/Daughter Tea

A Mothers (and Daughters) Day Tea will be held Saturday, May 13, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., at Vernonia Community Church. Wear a hat and bring your favorite cup and/or teapot setting for table decor. There will be songs, stories, a special speaker for devotion, prizes, and more.

This will be a potluck. Please call 503-429-8382 to RSVP by May 6, and to find out what type of food to bring.

Church Directory

VERNONIA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Grant Williams, Pastor
957 State Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-6790
Sunday Breakfast 9:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 9:45 a.m.
*B.L.A.S.T. w/Nursery 10:00 a.m.
*Bible Learning and Scripture Training
Wednesday Prayer Meeting 7:00 p.m.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

David Jenkins, Pastor
662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia,
503 816-1989
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Sunday Evening Service 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study 7:00 p.m.
(in the parsonage)

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

Jeff Cheney, Branch President
1350 E. Knott Street
Vernonia, 503 429-7151
Sacrament Meeting, Sunday 10 a.m.
Sunday School & Primary 11:20 a.m.
Relief Society, Priesthood and
Young Women, Sunday 12:10 p.m.

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Pastoral Associate Juanita Dennis
960 Missouri Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-8841
Mass Schedule
Sunday 12:00 Noon
Religious Education
Sunday 10:30 a.m.

VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

Carl Pense, Pastor
850 Madison Avenue
Vernonia, 503 429-1103
Sunday Worship Service: 10:30 a.m.
Children's Sunday School

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

John Aitken II, Pastor, 396-1856
2nd Ave. and Nehalem St.
Vernonia, 503 429-8301
Morning Worship, 9:15 a.m.
Bible Study 10:30 a.m.

ST. AUGUSTINE (CANTERBURY) EPISCOPAL CHURCH

375 North St. (Vernonia Grange Hall)
Vernonia, 503 705-2173
Please call for service schedule.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

John Cahill, Pastor
359 "A" Street
Vernonia, 503 429-1161
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Evening Worship
Saturday, 6:00 p.m.

NEHALEM VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH

Gary Taylor, Pastor
Grant & North Streets
Vernonia, 503 429-5378
Sunday School 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Nursery available
Wednesday Service 7:00 p.m.

VERNONIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Sam Hough, Evangelist
410 North Street
Vernonia, 503 429-6522
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Every Wednesday:
Ladies' Bible Study 9:30 a.m.
Ladies' Worship 10:00 a.m.
Children's Choir 3:00 p.m.
Family Bible Study 7:00 p.m.