



## **GROW LOCAL FACTSHEET: CREATING A PATCH FROM SCRATCH**



To create a patch from scratch means starting from the very beginning. In gardening, the soil is a “very good place to start”. This is the medium in which your plants will be growing, so if it is healthy and full of goodness, there is a much better chance of your plants being healthy and full of goodness.

### **The Soil.**

Healthy garden soil should be loaded with organic matter. Decaying organic matter is the food source for plants in nature. Organic matter in garden soil improves the soil structure and feeds the microorganisms and insects. The more beneficial microorganisms your soil can support, the less bad organisms will survive. The beneficial “bugs” feed on harmful microbes (such as nematodes and certain soil borne diseases). They also release more nutrients into the soil when they die. The more beneficial microorganisms in the soil, the more nutrients in the soil.

Organic matter also contains acids that can make plant roots more permeable, improving their uptake of water and nutrients, and can dissolve minerals within the soil, leaving them available for plant roots.

**Compost** is regarded highly by gardeners as a way of enriching soil. It is any kind of decayed organic matter. Finished compost looks like rich soil: dark and crumbly with an earthy smell. When the compost cooking process is complete, weed seeds, fungus spores and other undesirable substances that may have gone into the compost bin should no longer be viable. Compost can be added to your gardens at anytime, either turned into the soil or used as a mulch or top dressing.

Perennial weeds, pesticide treated material and diseased plants should really be kept out of the compost bin, but nearly every form of plant material can be added. Grass clippings, leavers, garden waste, vegetable peels, sawdust, straw, paper, animal manure...all can go in



to the compost. Animal manure is a great addition to compost, but cat, dog, pig and human manures should be avoided because of their disease potential for humans.<sup>1</sup>

**Green Manure** Green manures are cover crops grown with the intention of turning them back into the soil. This method would be more useful in the vegetable garden or in a newly created bed where tilling will not harm existing perennial plants.<sup>1</sup>

Different green manures offer different advantages. Some are grown for their deep roots and ability to breakup and loosen compacted soil (like lucerne). The legumes (peas, clover and vetch), have the ability to take nitrogen from the air and release it into the soil via their roots. When allowed to flower, clover attracts to pollinators and beneficial insects. All green manures will suppress weeds and prevent erosion and nutrient runoff in areas that would otherwise be unplanted. They all help with creating good soil structure and food for the microbes, when tilled in and decomposed.

Popular choices for green manure include: annual ryegrass, barley, buckwheat, clover, winter wheat and winter rye.<sup>1</sup>

**Soil Fertility.** The nutrients in your soil are the final component in building healthy soil. Just like people, plants need certain nutrients to grow and to fend off disease. Organic fertilizers can be made from plant, animal or mineral sources and are basically returning what was taken from the soil. Organic fertilizers are released slowly, which means that plants can feed as they need to. There is no sudden change in the makeup of the soil which might harm the microbial activity.

“Building healthy soil is an ongoing process. By making healthy soil a focus at the start of making a garden, you will have a head start on creating a sustainable organic garden.” **Marie Iannotti**



Picture source [www.homesteadandgardens.com](http://www.homesteadandgardens.com).

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