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Horticulture News

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I have seen many soil test results for lawn and garden soils and have found that the vast majority of these soils are deficient in organic matter.

Organic matter is a good way to improve garden soil as it improves a heavy (clay dominated) soil by improving tilth, aeration and how quickly the soil absorbs water. However, organic matter added in the spring should be well decomposed and finely shredded/ground. Manures and compost should have a good earthy smell without a hint of ammonia. Add a 2-inch layer of organic matter to the surface of the soil and work the materials into the soil thoroughly. Be sure soils are dry enough to work before tilling as wet soils will produce clods.

To determine if a soil is too wet to work, grab a handful and squeeze. If water comes out, it is much too wet. Even if no water drips out, it still may not be dry enough to work. Push a finger into the soil you squeezed. If it crumbles, it is dry enough, but if your finger just leaves an indentation, more time is needed. Be sure to take your handfuls of soil from the depth you plan to work the soil because deeper soils may contain more moisture than the surface.

Often people will mistakenly add sand to their clay soil thinking that will make it easier to work. In fact, adding sand to clay will make the soil so hard you will think it is concrete!