

March 6, 2019



Back to Basics - Soil to Mulch
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Early spring is a good time to return to the basics when planning to cultivate a beautiful landscape. The first gardening basic is to start with good soil. The best way to improve the soil (if necessary) is to add organic material such as compost. Compost worked into the soil can improve the soil composition, texture and water holding capacity. Compost, or other organic amendments, benefit all soil types. Sandy soil will hold more water and clay soil will be less compacted. Both will be easier to work with.

Another garden basic is to know the requirements of each plant before they are planted in the (now) well-conditioned soil. Determine how much sun or shade a specific plant requires for optimum growth. Research that plant's growth habit and put them in an area where they will thrive - not just survive! It is important to know the cold hardiness of each plant. Read plant container labels at the nursery to help determine the plant's water requirements, the cold hardiness zones, color, height, spread, and growth rate.

Take into account the type of plant before planting. An annual is a plant in which the entire life cycle is (normally) completed in a single growing season. A biennial is a plant that (normally) requires two growing seasons to complete its life cycle. Perennials are plants that live from year to year and do not die after flowering.

It is very important to have the correct irrigation method and amount of water available for each plant. One of the most common gardening mistakes is over watering or under watering. Think about grouping plants by their watering needs.

Mulch is the final garden basic to top everything off. Mulch is a layer of material applied to the surface of the soil. An effective mulch allows air and water to penetrate the soil and serves as a long lasting and attractive layer. Mulch has many important functions in the landscape. Mulch controls weeds, conserves moisture, moderates soil temperature, prevents erosion, and plant-based (organic) mulches can improve soil fertility. Apply mulch in late spring when the soil warms up. The mulch depth depends on the texture of the mulch applied. Coarse textured

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mulches can be applied four inches deep while finely textured mulches only need to be applied up to two inches. Organic mulches need to be replenished periodically because they will decompose over time. Mulch is a very important garden basic because it aids water conservation and soil protection.

Two public education classes are coming up that look very exciting for home gardeners. “Second Saturdays with Barry” is March 9 and held at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden. The SDG will reopen in April but join Master Gardeners for things to do early with vegetables. On Wednesday, March 13, the annual “Back to Basics” class is offered in Cameron Park at the Community Center. These classes are free.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center. The garden is open on the second Saturday of each month, 9:00 a.m. to noon, till April 2019. On campus parking is \$2.

For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.