

MUN Community Garden

Spring Workshop

May 9, 2013

SOIL PREPARATION

Inspect your plot.

-Check the pH. A pH around of 6.5 is good for most things. If it is lower add powdered limestone at the rate of 1 lb per 10 sq. ft. the first year then ½ lb per 10 sq. ft. each year after. There are two kinds of limestone, *calcitic* (all calcium carbonate) and *dolomitic* with about 30% magnesium carbonate. I prefer dolomitic, since NL soils tend to be magnesium deficient. The powdered form will act more quickly but the pelleted form will last longer. Spread it in the fall and dig it in for best effect since it can interfere with nutrient uptake if added along with other amendments.

-Try the crumble test- it should hold together gently when squeezed but crumble when given a poke.

-Does it look relatively dark brown in color, indicating that the humus levels are good.

-Do the weeds look healthy? They are connoisseurs of good soil, and the presence of some types such as buttercups and sheep sorrel (sally suckers) will tell you if your soil is too acidic or waterlogged.

-Is there enough soil in the bed? It should be to the top of the wooden frame. Eighteen to 24 inches deep is recommended. If you don't want your plants to dry out too quickly they need to set deep roots.

-Is it compacted by being walked on, or too rocky to grow root crops such as carrot, parsnip and beet.

You may have to remove any rocks larger than an inch. Or at least prepare a trench with finer soil for your carrots. Do not dig when the soil is wet as the structure that you worked so hard for can be destroyed. If it is in good condition it probably won't need deep digging, just the removal of weeds and the addition of a few amendments such as compost. The Pisces **seafood compost** supplied, is a nearly perfect addition. It is nutritionally well-balanced for this purpose though it may be a little acidic initially until the shell fragments have had a chance to break down. Other organic amendments include **bone-meal** to supply phosphorus for root growth and fruit development; **blood-meal** as a quick-release nitrogen source (though it can burn the plant), **wood ash** (from a source with no plastic or pressure-treated wood) to supply potassium for strong stems in most plants and bright colour in flowers and powdered **seaweed** to supply essential micronutrients and plant hormones (lay it to dry on your driveway or patio and crumble it by rolling a log over the dried material). **Liquid fish and seaweed emulsion** is available locally (made in P.E.I.) to be diluted and sprayed onto plants where it will act as a direct source of nutrients during the growing season. Your cabbages, potatoes and squash and cucumbers will thank you.