

Improving your soil

Farmyard Manure

As ground becomes vacant you can dig it over and spread farmyard manure over the surface. Remember to enquire about your supply of manure, to avoid problems of manure contaminated with weed killer. For more details please see this link:

http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/organicgardening/herbicide_damage.php?dm_i=4UO,6RPJ,JJZTV,GS0E,1

Leave the soil roughly dug in large clumps and the worms will break these up as they get the manure. The freezing and thawing of water in the soil will cause the soil to break up finely so becoming easier to handle in the spring.

Leaf mould

If you don't have a cage for your leaf mould and want to make it, get started at the beginning of the month to be ready when the leaves arrive. There are many reasons why leaf mould is good for the vegetable garden including: improving soil structure, increasing soil water retention and it also encourages earthworms. If you have 1 or 2-year old leaf mould ready to use, apply as a mulch for winter coverage of bare soil.

Garden Organic has a useful fact sheet:

http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/factsheets/making_leafmould.php

Green Manures

Even into October, it is not too late to sow certain green manures for a winter cover crop, especially if the soil remains warm for a few weeks. A green manure will mop up any residual fertility from the soil, preventing loss of nutrients over winter from heavy rainfall. It will also protect the structure of the soil and add fertility in the case of leguminous types that have the ability to 'fix' nitrogen from the atmosphere.



Sowing green manure after crops have been harvested and ground cleared

Once an area has been cleared of crops, weed it and rake it level. You can start sowing green manures once rain has soaked the soil, or irrigate well if the weather is dry. Some will survive the winter while others may be killed by the frost - though the dead plants still provide some protection for the soil.

You should also consult your crop rotation plans before sowing a green manure. Several green manures are legumes, so should be kept in the pea and bean section of the rotation, and remember that also mustard is a green manure from the brassica family. This fact sheet may be a useful guide:

<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/factsheets/g3.php>

Seaweed

Seaweed has been used as a soil improver for centuries, particularly in coastal areas. Seaweed contains several useful plant nutrients, including nitrogen, potassium, phosphate and magnesium. There are dried and liquidised forms available from garden centres and seaweed is a common additive to fertilisers, both organic and non-organic. You may wish to take advantage of our location and apply fresh seaweed, rather than opt for the processed seaweed products. Although seaweed is salty, the salt is not usually present in sufficient amounts to damage crops or soil, and the salt will in any case leach out readily with rainfall as it is highly soluble. You have different options available – digging in, using as a mulch or adding to your compost. If dug in fresh, then seaweed is used like any other soil conditioner, digging it in to one or two spades' depth below the surface and using up to a barrow load per square metre (if you have this much available). If placed on the compost heap, fresh seaweed should be mixed in with woody or fibrous material (prunings or paper for example). It can become rather slimy and gelatinous on its own or when mixed only with kitchen waste or lawn clippings. Fresh seaweed can be used as mulch, but it often becomes rather slimy and smelly as it decomposes on the soil surface, so is perhaps better dug in if this is likely to be a problem.

References

- <http://www.vegetableexpert.co.uk/growing-vegetables-month-month.html>
- <http://apps.rhs.org.uk/advicesearch/Profile.aspx?pid=301>