



Look after your soil

Understanding your soil is crucial to plant growth. Soil is the foundation of a healthy garden, and the healthier it is, the more drought resistant your plants will be. First up, you need to understand your soil type or types as this has the biggest impact upon the amount of nutrients and water available to plants. Put simply, the soil type dictates the maximum amount of water you should apply and how frequently you need to do this. You can improve the quality of your soil by adding compost or well-rotted manure. Full of natural bacteria and micro-organisms, these agents not only boost soil health, they also increase soil moisture retention.

Shallow silt loams over gravel are the soil types commonly found in many parts of Canterbury. These can only retain a small amount of water for plant growth. You can improve your soil's ability to retain moisture by:

- 💧 **Think about using a soil improver.**

Excellent soil improvers include organic matter like compost, animal manure or worm farm residue alongside bagged soil improvers and conditioners, specifically designed to change the composition of your soil. These are also called soil amendments (as they encourage changes in your soil by introducing more clay). All of the above have the ability to improve your soil's water and nutrient holding capacities.

- 💧 **Get the timing right.**

The easiest time to improve your soil is when you are planting as the act of digging and mixing the soil produces the best effect. Make sure you have some compost, manure or other supplement on hand when you're introducing new plants. This will allow these inputs to be thoroughly mixed into the top 30cm of soil.

- 💧 **Keep soil healthy.**

Aerating your lawn and around trees at least once a year helps improve water penetration. When planting, turn and cultivate the soil and add compost or fertilizer to improve moisture retention and grow healthier plants that need less water to stay strong.

- 💧 **Don't underestimate the power of mulch.**

Apply a layer of mulch after spreading a soil improver like compost over the top of an established garden. Even if you don't use a soil improver, the addition of mulch will make a significant difference to the moisture retaining ability of your soil – as well as keeping out weeds! Excellent mulch products range from bark, pea-straw and wood chips to newspaper and cardboard. If you're worried about the look of mulch, don't; new products are hitting the market all the time designed specifically to suit the aesthetics of your garden.

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