



Your Full Service Nursery & Landscape Center  
Since 1987  
3166 Willow Creek Road, Prescott  
[www.mortimer-nursery.com](http://www.mortimer-nursery.com)  
776-8000 / [info@mortimer-nursery.com](mailto:info@mortimer-nursery.com)

### **Soil: Where Your Garden Grows**

When choosing plants for our yard, we typically consider a plant's light and water preferences but tend to overlook its soil preference. However, soil is home to a plant's root system and unhappy roots means an unhappy, or even dying, plant. Water logged soil keeps roots saturated and prevents oxygen from filling the pores between soil particles. If no oxygen is available, roots can literally "drown" in saturated soils.

Most plants that do well in our climate are adapted to dry conditions which also means they hate "wet feet". However, most soils in our area are poorly drained. Obviously, this poses a problem for dryland plants that prefer well-drained soil. Before you landscape an area check the drainage – standing puddles or ground that stays wet for long periods are obvious signs of poorly drained soil. Knowing the texture of your soil can also help in determining its drainage: make a clump with wet soil -if it's slippery and sticks together then you have clay soil that doesn't drain well.

At this point, you have several options:

- Reserve these areas for plants that prefer wet soil but keep in mind they will need supplemental irrigation in our dry climate;
- Build raised beds. This option is best for vegetables, herbs, perennials and compact shrubs but is not enough for large shrubs or trees;
- Create swales or dry creek beds to direct run-off away from these spots;
- Improve your soil.

Improving your soil is most practicable in small to mid-size areas and can be done by adding various organic materials:

- Compost (decomposing plant material and kitchen waste) can be added to soil near the end of its decomposition process. Compost improves aeration and drainage in heavy soils. It also adds essential micro-nutrients such as copper, zinc, molybdenum, boron, iron, manganese and chloride to the soil;
- Gypsum (a natural element – sulphate of calcium) will increase porosity resulting in better drainage and improved oxygen availability. Unlike compost, gypsum offers few micro-nutrients but does add calcium and sulphur to soil;
- Perlite, pumice and vermiculite improve clay soil by providing larger particles sizes, resulting in larger pore spaces.

Bear in mind that improving clay soil can take several years of adding soil amendments. Amendments can be added at any time of the year either by digging them in or topdressing the soil with them. However, fall is the best time as this allows the amendment to work into the soil over winter.

Don't be discouraged by clay soil. Review your options and choose one that works best for you and the area to be landscaped.