

What to plant in dry and sandy soil

Often homeowners are stuck with dry, sandy subsoil that the contractors dug out of the basement excavation, and spread over lot to save the cost of hauling it away. Instead of going to the expense of taking away the old unwanted soil, homeowners have another option. They can select plants that thrive in the existing soil condition and seek to enrich and stabilize the soil.

With sand, organic material must be added to help retain moisture and plant nutrients; otherwise moisture will seep

away quickly and leave plants thirsting for food and water. Some recommended organic materials for conditioning soil include peat moss, leaf mold, garden compost and good garden loam. There are many different forms of soil conditioners available at garden centres.

The most important thing to remember when gardening in sandy soil, is that plants need to get off to a good start. There are many annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees that prefer dry, sandy conditions, but only after they've been properly fed. With


annuals and perennial plants, the whole bed area should be improved by working the organic material and plant food into the top ten or twelve inches.

When planting trees and shrubs, it is important that the soil be improved with good garden soil and organic matter in the planting holes. Start by measuring the dimension of the rootball. Dig the planting hole twice as wide and deep as the rootball of the tree or shrub going into it. Half-fill the hole with good topsoil containing lots of organic matter, good garden soil and about a fistful of a balanced fertilizer, all mixed together. Set the tree or shrub in the hole at the correct planting depth, then backfill around the roots with more of the prepared topsoil mixture. Cover the roots, then gently but firmly pat down and add water. When the water seeps away, continue backfilling and gently move the plant back and forth, to further settle the soil around the roots and prevent air pockets. Soak with water once more, and then completely backfill the hole leaving a saucer of space to hold water.

One of the best choices for planting in very dry places is the Scotch Pine. It will grow quickly, up to 35 ft. in 15 years. The most common drawback of trees that thrive in dry, sandy locations is that, while they are fast growers, they often have very brittle wood. This brittleness makes them vulnerable to wind and ice damage. These trees also shed bark, small branches and twigs. Despite these drawbacks, they do grow in hard to cultivate places and provide shade and attractive colour.

Another popular choice is the Chinese Elm. It grows 35 ft. in just five years, but must be pruned at planting time to remove rival leading shoots.

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