



Petite Gardenscapes

Sensible designs for the weekend gardener

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Special Interest Articles:

- Improving your soil
- Vermiculture-how to have your own worm farm
- Working with shade in your garden

Getting a soil test will help you get your garden ready to look its best

New monthly features

>Plant disorder of the month

>Bulb of the month

Questions or comment? Contact Pat at pbaganz@voyager.net or at 262-353-6555

Getting Our Hands Dirty

Amending Soil

Before the snow has melted, let's start thinking about that brown stuff your plants are growing in and how to make it even better than it is now. For **southeastern** gardeners, the main soil is clay, while gardeners from the **western** side of the state deal with silty and sandy soils, and if you land "**up nort**", you're dealing with loamy or sandy soils. The common denominator here is that **all of these soils need amending** to make the soil drain better (clay) or improve nutrient holding capacity (sand). Organic matter is mostly animal and plant residues that are decomposing, and while organisms in the soil feed on them, they don't add much needed nutrients to your plants.

Testing Soil

So, a two-step process here: before adding compost to your garden bed, take a soil sample and determine what's

lacking: nitrogen, phosphate, and/or potassium. If you're a do-it-yourself-er, contact your local county extension (www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/ozauske) (or whichever county you live in) to get instructions on sending a sample to them for analysis. If you want someone else to do the "dirty" work, contact me (pbaganz@yahoo.com) and we'll set up an appointment in early spring. Once you know what nutrients your soil is lacking, you can move on from there.

Nutrients

Once you know what you need, reading the bag at your local nursery will tell you what proportions of the nutrients to add (those 12-20-10 numbers) that your soil test told you to incorporate.

Organic Matter

Next step, adding organic matter: compost, peat moss (a warning, though,

as peat moss needs very thorough mixing in, or it will hold all the water to itself, and keep the water from your precious plants' roots). Aged horse manure, shredded leaves, straw, wood ash, sewage sludge (Did you know Milorganite is our own Milwaukee's famous invention that provides slow-release nitrogen made from sewage) are other organic amendments. You can start your own compost heap to provide you with all the organic materials you want every year, or you can keep a worm farm that will make rich soil conditioners from your table wastes- and yes, even from your junk mail! See page two for details.

Patience

One last warning, though, wait until your soil has dried out- maybe mid-May before trying to work it. Your muscles and your soil will thank you for your patience.



Getting Down to Earth (worms) with Vermiculture

What is it?

Vermiculture is the growing of worms that will break down wastes, and whose castings (poop) contain nutrients.

Why is vermiculture important?

- *Because it takes 8 gal. of water to grind 1pound of food through your garbage disposal.
- *Because sewage treatment plants use time chemicals and money to turn that ground up garbage into sludge which must be used and/or transported elsewhere.
- *Because landfills are running out of space, and it costs money to maintain them. In the meantime, your organic wastes buried under inorganic wastes are breaking down in an anaerobic process (without oxygen) and creating methane gas.
- *Because burning waste at an incinerator pollutes our air.

What will it do for my garden?

- *It's a fertilizer, rich in nutrients that have been converted from

insoluble minerals in waste and turned into a soluble form that's made available to plants.

- * A 20% increase in growth and a 150% increase in root mass.
- *Improves soil structure,
- *introduces micro-organisms,
- *water- holding capacity
- *attracts burrowing earthworms, which in the garden adds to the porosity and air spaces of the soil.
- * new studies also suggest that a chitinase compound found in worm castings can inhibit some insects.

Here's how:

A worm farm can be a series of bins filled with the foods worms love to eat (actually they seem to love eating anything, from junk mail to spoiled fruit) As each bin full of worm food turns into fertilizer, a new bin is introduced on top of the old one, filled with new food for the worms. They, not having big brains but a real sense for where the fresh food is, migrate upward to their new home and start

chomping and processing new castings.

Caveats: these guys have to live indoors in Wisconsin, at least during the cold months- they will die when the temperature drops below 40 degrees. These guys can live 4-5 years and they do reproduce, so as they die, more baby worms take their place. They are very shy (don't like light) so they aren't too intimidating.

Tips-

- *Don't feed them dairy foods or meats- they will smell.
- *Cover then with damp newspaper to keep them in darkness. This can be helpful if you forget to feed them or are out of town for a week or more. After the food you have fed them is gone, they will start eating their ceiling and be perfectly happy.

www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html has a good slide show on worm farms.

Bottom line? Try a worm farm to enrich your garden- your garden will love you for it.



Worm castings will add nutrients and condition your soil

Check out more information at www.petitegardenscapes.com now up and running!



Shady-side Gardens

By Elizabeth O'Connell,



Actea rubra (Red Baneberry) at the edge of a Woodland

'Many shade-tolerant Plants can...create a Lush display, but are Tough and easy to Care for.'

Elizabeth O'Connell
Monthly contributor and Ozaukee Gardener columnist for the Ozaukee Press



Epimedium (Barrenwort) thrives in the shady garden mid-spring.

Although many people picture sun-loving flowers when they think of gardens, there are wonderful landscaping options for yards with more shade. Many shade-tolerant plants can not only create a lush display but are tough and easy to care for.

Shade can be defined in many ways. Most garden locations are considered "shady" if they receive fewer than five hours of sunlight a day. The effects of morning and afternoon sunlight can be dramatically different, however, and it's important to know your site when planning your shade garden.

Gardeners have the greatest choice from the palette of shade plants if the area being planted gets morning light or dappled sun throughout the day. Early morning light is not as intense as bright, hot afternoon sun. Blue- and gold-leafed Hostas and other perennials like Brunnera, Tiarellas, and Ligularias will thrive in morning light if they have adequate water. *Hakonechloa* 'All Gold', a grass with narrow, flowing foliage and the cut-leaves of ferns provide

contrast to the large leaves of other shade loving plants. Many other shade lovers come in gold and variegated forms which add a splash of color in dark corners.

Areas under large maples and conifers can be dry as well as shady so it may be necessary to provide supplemental water to plants in these areas. If extra water is unavailable, tough plants like baneberry or barrenwort (*Epimedium*) can be planted. Once established they'll spread to fill in empty spaces. New *Epimedium* cultivars like 'Elfin Pink' produce larger flowers than older selections.

Shredded bark mulch in these gardens not only gives the woodland feel but also conserves water and helps cut down on weeds. The large leaves of plants like hosta and mayapples (*Podophyllum*) cut down on weeding so shade gardens can be low maintenance once they are mature.

There are also small trees and shrubs that flower and thrive in shade gardens. Azaleas and rhododendrons start the spring display and Pagoda

dogwoods (*Cornus alternifolia*), small trees, are covered with white flowers in early summer. The selection 'Golden Shadows', with green leaves edged in gold is particularly striking.

Areas shaded by deciduous trees can begin the season with spring bulbs which bloom before the trees leaf out. Native wildflowers like Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria*) and Merrybells (*Uvularia*) also bloom in early spring along with Hellebores and Trillium. Azaleas, Rhododendrons, and other spring-blooming shrubs like Kerria with cascades of gold flowers also bring color to shady areas.

Summer in the shade garden opens with the forget-me-not blue flowers of Brunnera along with the white spikes of Tiarellas. Thalictrums range in size from 'Black Stockings' with 24-inch pink flower heads to the 8-foot white plumes of 'Elin'. Ligularias produce either spires of yellow or huge daisy-like blossoms in gold. Hydrangea (*H. arborescens*), woody shrubs, also burst into bloom.



Shady-side Gardens cont.

In late summer the final shade garden displays begin with Toadlilies (*Tricyrtis*), Cimicifugas, and Japanese Anemone. Natives like Big-leaf aster (*Aster macrophylla*) and Zig

Zag Goldenrod (*Soldago flexicaulis*) provide a final wealth of nectar for the bees and butterflies. Finally the last flowers open in late October when the Witch Hazel trees

(*Hamamelis virginiana*) sport their spidery yellow blooms.

A sophisticated tapestry of green, blue and gold foliage is the foundation of a shady

garden. Add the delicate fronds of ferns and grasses then punctuate the display with flowers. Owners of sunny properties may well envy the rich display possible in a well-planned shade

NEW FEATURES

Plant Disorder of the Month

Each month will feature some disgusting plant problem and how to treat it. In March, we're likely to see the results of hot, dry indoor weather on our house plants, so Red Spider Mite has the honor of being the first disorder:

The culprit is a two-spotted spider mite that sucks the sap from plants and results in curled, dried up, mottled leaves which are sometimes covered with a very fine webbing.

Prevention is best: raise humidity with

Red Spider Mite Damage



Entweb.clemson.edu

trays filled with water and mist the underside of leaves.

If it's too late for that, you will need to spray with an insecticidal soap. Fortunately, the plant usually recovers when the weather warms and humidity increases

BULB OF THE MONTH

The beautiful little yellow flower on the front page of this newsletter is *Eranthis hyemalis*, Winter Aconite, also known as Wolf's Bane. (It must work as wolf's bane because I've never seen a wolf in my yard.) This little beauty is one of the very first bulbs in spring and will often bloom in the snow, as Snowdrops also do. These love shade and add bright color after the dreary gray snow of a long winter.

Picture courtesy of