



Spring Soil Prep

As the days lengthen and the soil warms up, plants begin to put out new growth. Native plants function fine in our soils if the soil isn't compacted. They don't require additional fertilizers. Just allow their leaves and other debris to remain on top of the soil as a mulch, or apply a woody mulch. Both will provide food for the microbial community that in turn will open up the soil so rain can enter and be held over time.

Other plants may benefit from a 3/8" layer of compost or an organic fertilizer. The compost will add some beneficial life (microbes), soluble nutrients and organic matter. An organic fertilizer will feed the life in the soil which in turn will feed the plants. Organic fertilizers are formulated for specific types of plants. Choose the one for your plant and follow the instructions. Be aware they are slow release as compared to soluble fertilizers and some synthetic fertilizers. The microbial community will make the nutrients available to the plant, so this takes a little longer. One benefit of going this route is you will see your soil open up and become less compacted over time.

It is important to have plants or mulch cover over your soil year round. Mulch protects the soil from the drying effects of the sun, from being blown away by the wind, and from the force of the rainfall. When the sun shines on soil without plants or mulch, it heats up the water in the soil turning it to vapor and causing it to evaporate.

There is an important caveat to mulching everywhere in your garden. California is home to many bees. Some dwell in the ground. Do leave some soil bare so the bees can make their home in your garden. To learn more about CA native bees, visit <https://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/blog/beyond-honey-bee-learn-more-about-california-native-bees>

And remember to remind your gardeners not to use the blower on the soil.

Article courtesy of the San Mateo and San Francisco Counties Master Gardener Soil Specialist Group:

Terry Lyngso

Joe Lees

Kelly Torikai

Nancy Kruberg

Nick Landolfi