

## **SOIL: THE SOUL OF LIFE**

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**When I was a boy, growing up in the Deep Depression of the 30's, my elementary school teacher assigned soil as a subject on which to write an essay. At the time I thought it to be a monumental task. Quick research revealed just the opposite. After all, we were living at a time and place where it was essential to grow one's own food in order to survive. A small garden space provided my family the necessary area to ply agriculture. I found that writing the article was far easier than growing vegetables in the family-owned lot. Nearby coal mines had washed black silt on to our plot and remedial action had to be taken in order to grow good crops. It was then that I was introduced to soil improvement. Good soil was mandatory to grow vegetables in order to thwart the pangs of hunger.**

**Yes, we no longer possess Garden of Eden's quality of soil. To enjoy the lush beauty of plants in that first garden we must add considerable amendments to current soil. We also must realize that not every garden's soil is the same. In fact, not every space in our own lot enjoys the same fertility. That's where soil testing comes into play. Soil analysis is the first step toward soil improvement. Using the services of the local agricultural extension agency will be the best route to soil improvement. Knowing what is needed to make it right is the surest prescription for remedial action. One very important finding will be the state of soil pH. Without it's proper balance (6.5 ideal) all fertilizing will be for naught. The rose root system simply cannot ingest the nutrition that feeding furnishes without a proper pH reading.**

**To really understand soil we must first recognize what place it has in all life on this planet. Every living thing owes its existence to the soil. That is the reason for this article's title. It places soil in its proper perspective - the soul of life. Our Creator made us from dust and the scripture tells us that to dust we will return. Now that's proof aplenty that soil commands the top rung when it comes to the ladder of life.**

**Award winning roses on show tables were not there simply by accident. The rosarian applied many usable techniques to giving the roses a “good home.” It is safe to say that soil amending played a definite part in the growing process. To paraphrase a famous English rosarian/clergyman, Dean Reynolds Hole, writing in the 1860’s, said: “it takes a lot of digging and dunging to produce good roses.” That’s certainly true even to this day. The soil must be pliable so as not to restrict root growth. It also must allow air and water to enter the root area and thus sustain plant life, and it must contain chemical elements which promote good growth.**

**As to the “dunging”, this phase of soil activity takes on many forms. Manures have for years been at the top in fertilization. Many of the old-timers relied heavily on this form, especially that which comes from cattle. Then too, horse, sheep, and other animals provided waste for fertilization and still do. However, today’s rosarian relies on several other forms of organics. Composted vegetation, peat moss, ground bark, processed meals of various forms, mushroom compost, and other products have found their way into the rosarian’s feeding program. It is safe to say that organics play a most essential part in producing superior growth in plants of all species. Fortunately the market is now equipped with ready-mixed products that include several types of organic material. These mixes eliminate the need to apply them separately.**

**I would be remiss if I failed to mention chemical fertilizers and their part in providing good growth in plants - especially roses. The nation’s food basket would be rather bare if it were not for chemical application to crops. Their importance is paramount. However, without the addition of supplemental organics to the feeding program in roses, the resultant growth would not enjoy its lushness. Organics are that important.**

**As we survey the importance of good soil, let us never refer to it as “dirt.” Remember that it sustains all life and should enjoy prominence in our vocabulary. Ever since the day I tilled the coal infused soil of the depression era, I have revered soil. No one had to convince me of soil’s importance. The hunger pangs of my stomach told me so. Dig and dung it with all diligence and it just may reward**

**you with specimens on the head table of many rose shows.**

