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Gypsum Fact Sheet

Gypsum has been around as a garden additive for ages. It is traditionally used to help to break up clay soils to improve their structure. It is also very useful where grey water is being used as it will help to maintain the structure of the soil and prevent the harmful effects that long term application of sodium and phosphorous (some of the harmful ions in detergents) can have on the health of your soil.

Clay is often criticized as a growing medium. It however can be a great soil and usually contains high levels of nutrients.

Clay is a mineral that has many flat platelets that have an with an enormous surface area. A frequently cited example of this is that a gram of bentonite clay has the surface area of a football field. This huge surface area helps to explain what makes clay special. The huge surface area means it has more surface area to hold water. Therefore clay soils do hold water really well which in times of dry weather is no bad thing. Clay also has a weak negative charge which is why they hold nutrients well in comparison to more sandy or silty soils.



If you are not sure if your soil is a clay soil and if it would benefit from the addition of Gypsum there are a few tests you can do.

The first test on soil is called the aggregate stability test where you take a small amount of dry soil to be tested and put it on a plate or saucer of clean water (preferably rain water or distilled water). If a halo of clay or milky cloud surrounds the soil clumps then you have a clay soil.

The second test to confirm the first is to put a handful of soil to be tested in a clean glass jar and fill the jar two thirds with clean water. Shake rapidly and if the jar is still really cloudy after about 10 minutes it will indicate that you have a soil that will respond to the addition of Gypsum.

There is no one application rate for the use of Gypsum. This is because the amount of Gypsum needed depends on the amount of clay in the soil. As a guide about 200 grams of Gypsum per square metre or 2 cupfuls is recommended. After this has been dug in for a week or two you can do the same tests again. You should see a major difference. If not repeat the application and test again in a week or two.

Liquid gypsum is now available and is really very effective because it will begin to work straight away as the gypsum has been ground to a very fine powder before being mixed in the ready to use pack. If you are in a hurry for a result use Liquid Gypsum.

