

# Managing Your Soil

South Australia has some of Australia's most reactive soils – so the way you prepare and treat your soil can have significant effects on both your home and garden.

Importantly, well managed soil will protect the foundations and footings of your home. Very dry ground can crack walls, while soggy areas around the home can lead to salt damp.

And when you come to planning your garden, preparing your soil properly is critical and will always affect the success of your garden.

Remember - before doing any earth works in your garden, check the location of any water, electrical and gas pipes and drains, and any phone or overhead cables.

In considering the style and scope of your garden you will need to think about the generally layout of your property. Your local nursery, professional landscaper or landscape architect may be able to offer advice. Many provide quoting, consultation and design services.

It's always a good idea to work with any natural slopes you may have – they add interest and attraction. Rocks create planting pockets for attractive shrubs and will minimise water run off.

Very steep slopes will need to be terraced so that water can soak in and be retained. It is important to condition soil in these areas to allow good plant growth.

You will need to find out what kind of soil you have because success will depend upon soil preparation and choosing the right plants for your area. Most Adelaide soils tend to be slightly alkaline – your local nursery or landscaper can provide advice on soil testing.

Bad drainage is one of the basic gardening problems and surface run off can be disastrous. There are a number of ways you can improve water drainage on your property.

Mulch - adding organic matter to the soil improves both its moisture and nutrient holding capacity, saving on water and fertiliser. It's particularly important to improve

the to 15 – 20 centimetres of soil where the feeder roots of plants will develop.

Sandy soil can be helped to retain its moisture by adding plenty of organic manure. The drainage of clay soils will be improved by a liberal addition of gypsum – about one kilogram to two square metres.

Aged animal manures, compost and proprietary conditioning products are ideal soil improvers. Mix them in your soil prior to planting out.

Sometimes soils develop a waxy coating that causes poor water penetration, excessive surface run off, shallow root systems and stressed plants. Soil wetting agents can help – they substantially break down waxy barriers and can increase penetration and reduce run off by up to 50%.

Don't forget to eradicate weeds before you start - they will compete with your young plants for moisture and may smother early growth.

Once your soil is prepared you are ready to start planting!