



The Soul of Soil: A Soil-Building Guide for Master Gardeners and Farmers, 4th Edition

By Joseph Smillie, Grace Gershuny

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Soil is the basis not only for all gardening, but for all terrestrial life. No aspect of agriculture is more fundamental and important, yet we have been losing vast quantities of our finite soil resources to erosion, pollution, and development.

Now back in print, this eminently sensible and wonderfully well-focused book provides essential information about one of the most significant challenges for those attempting to grow delicious organic vegetables: the creation and maintenance of healthy soil.

Chapter 2, "Understanding the Soil System," is alone worth the price of admission. Gershuny and Smillie give lay readers and experts a clear explanation of subjects--soil life and nutrient cycles--that have confounded most authors. Nowhere will the reader find simpler and more coherent descriptions of key concepts including cation exchange capacity and chelation.

There are other books about soil available, including Grace Gershuny's comprehensive *Start with the Soil*, and there are books that feature chapters on soil building. What distinguishes *The Soul of Soil* is the authors' concise presentation; they give readers important information, including technical essentials, without getting bogged down in scientific or quasiscientific mumbo-jumbo. In addition, useful tables list specific compost materials, green manures, and other resources that allow growers to translate into action the more general information provided by the book.

The soil-building techniques featured include:

- Organic matter management
- Building and maintaining humus
- On-site composting
- Green manures and rotations
- Cultivation and weed control
- Nutrient balances and soil testing
- Using mineral fertilizers
- Planning for organic certification

Updates to the 1999 edition include analysis of Proposed Rules for the National Organic Standards, and expanded recommendations for private testing services and soil-testing equipment for home gardeners and organic farmers.

All of us involved in the cultivation of plants--from the backyard gardener to the largest farmer--need to help regenerate a "living soil," for only in the diversity of the soil and its creatures can we ensure the long-term health of ourselves and our environment. *The Soul of Soil* offers everyone a basic understanding of what soil is and what we can do to improve our own patch of it. Seen in this light, this practical handbook will be an inspiration as well.

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