

THE PLANTSMAN

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Clay holds onto a far greater amount of water and nutrients than sand does. So if you add some clay to your sand it is going to make a world of difference. The best part is that adding clay makes a permanent change for the better! So, even though it may be a bit fiddly, you only ever have to do it once.

First get your clay

If you know someone who has a clay soil and wants to get rid of some - great but most of us will have to buy it in. Bentonite clay is the most accessible. It comes in two forms. Calcium Bentonite clay which is available from Milne Feeds of Welshpool (cash or cheque, no EFTPOS), or Sodium Bentonite clay which is sold as Clumping Cat Litter at supermarkets. I have found Coles and Woolies home brands to be the purest.

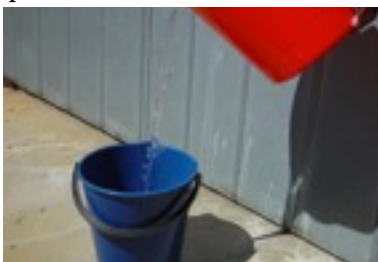
My preferred application rate is between 0.5 to 2.0 kg per square metre. Adding it to a new garden is simple. Sprinkle it onto dry soil and then thoroughly dig it through the soil to a depth of 30 cm. To improve existing gardens or lawns follow the steps below

Step One

Pour about 1 kg into the bucket



and add water to about three quarters full.



Step Two

Leave to soak for at least 24 hours. Sodium based clays swell when they get wet. Calcium ones don't.



Step Three

Stir vigorously. I find that a paint



stirrer on the electric drill works best. The water will turn very milky as the fine clay particles become suspended.

Step Four

Allow the mix to settle for about



thirty seconds and then pour off the suspended clay into a watering can. Any lumps of clay should be left in the bucket, more water added and then stirred again. Depending upon the quality of the clay it may be necessary to repeat the process a few times. Most clays will have some components that may never "dissolve" no matter how much you try. Any residues after repeated stirring can simply be spread out on the garden.

Step Five

Treat your sandy soil or lawn with a wetting agent first to ensure the clay mix does not simply run off.

Step Six

Pour on slowly. Because of the fine clay particles the water will not penetrate the soil as fast as previously. The best method for bare soil that can be disturbed is to



pour a little on, let it soak in, then turn the soil before adding more.

When adding clay to existing gardens it has to be done sparingly over a long period otherwise the clay will simply build up as a thin layer on the surface. For best results apply the clay solution just before a watering cycle.

Step Seven

If you have added clay at the higher rate it may now be necessary to adjust your watering to account for the much slower infiltration rate.

One big bonus of adding clay at a high rate is that it is possible to overcome non-wettability of your sandy soil - permanently. Another huge bonus from adding clay is that the soil will now be much better at retaining organic matter.

Clay is a great soil amender but don't forget that organic matter is the real source of life.

