

"Ask The Plant Groom"(tm) by Dale Groom ... "The Plant Groom"(tm)

For: QA1051

For the past two years I have had trouble growing green beans and tomatoes our black soil. The tomatoes grow to beautiful plants. About the time they start blooming, the leaves turn brown and die. When I pulled the vines out of the ground this past fall, I found grub worms in most of the holes. If this is the problem, is there anything that can be put in the holes at planting time to control them? My green beans never get more than two to three inches high.- D. E.

It sounds like you are having some soil problems to me. Here is what I would do this year and soon. Have your soil tested for all its nutrients, pH and organic matter. You may send a request and long self addressed envelope with two 1<sup>st</sup> class stamps on it to Soil Text Kit, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Dallas, TX 75124 to get you started. I would also add approximately 6" of quality organic materials to the plot and till well. Two inches each of brown Canadian sphagnum peat moss, compost and shredded pine bark mulch will all work as organic matter sources. I would use an equal mixture of all the suggested sources. Each of the materials provide different properties to help improve your soil's growing conditions.

After you receive the results from your soil test I suggest you follow the recommendations as close as possible. For example, you may not find the exact analysis of fertilizers recommended, so secure the closest numbers you can find. Of course read and follow label directions when applying.

I would plant disease resistant well adapted varieties at the proper time. The average last killing frosts or freezes for most of Texas is mid to late March. Supposedly it would be fine to set tomatoes out after this time. I, on the other hand do not set mine out until around April 1. I believe that when I plug healthy transplants into well prepared WARM soil the tomatoes hit the ground running, grow quickly and begin production on time from strong plants. You may want to try some of my favorites this season including: Porter, Celebrity, Carnival, 444 and Sweet 100.

Beans may be first planted at the end of the third week of March in most of Texas. I plant both beans and tomatoes in raised beds of well amended soil. Improved drainage helps to prevent root rot and encourage healthy root growth. From healthy roots robust plants grow most often provide the desired results.

Try these bean varieties this season: Derby, Tendercrop, Topcrop or Greencrop.

To get more indepth vegetable gardening information for we Texan's I suggest "The Vegetable Book" ... a Texan's Guide to Gardening by Sam Cotner, Texas Gardener Press, Waco, Tx.

I do not believe grubs were your problem with the tomatoes or beans you grew. There are not any products that I'm ware of to control grubs as you have suggested. There are grub control products, but I would not use them as you have indicated they may be used. Good luck with your veggies in 2006 and let me know how you come out!

Please advise me of a brand name cat litter used for potting soils of sansevieria, aloe vera and other succulent plants.

I have searched among the many brands of cat litter and have not been able to find the ingredients listed on the bags.

I have been given a mixture for growing the plants I mentioned which uses ordinary garden soil, clay cat litter and a sprinkling of 12-24-12 fertilizer granules. Now that I have the mixture information I am unable to make it because I can't find clay cat litter. Please help!. - O. L. M.

Probably most of the lower priced plain, non scented cat litters are clay. Personally I would not grow any of my sanseviera's, aloes, cacti, jade plants or any other plant in a mixture as you have indicated. But, this is one of the things I like about "gardening" in general. There are several ways to do the same thing. The choice is ... yours. You could purchase a good growing mix for the plants listed.

An alternative is purchase a bag of coarse well drained potting soil and add about 2/3rds of this mix to 1/3 coarse washed sharp sand or perlite and blend well. This has worked very well for me and many other folks that have used it. The "sharp" sand can be purchased from lumber yards, landscaping supplies company, brick co, and in bags at home centers. It may be labeled "Play Sand" for children's sand boxes. In other words it does not have to say "sharp sand" to be a sharp type sand. What one is after is a coarse grained washed sand by whatever name it is called. Perlite may be found in very small to very large bags at just about any retail garden center or nursery.

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