



Washtenaw County Conservation District

JULY 2018

Soils in Washtenaw County

By Dr. Carley Kratz

Knowing what type of soil you have is helpful in many situations; whether you are planning to do construction, grow a crop, locate a new septic field, or determine which trees or plants will work best on your property.

Sandy soils have large particles, and large spaces between the particles called pores. A sandy soil will tend to dry out more quickly and not hold many nutrients. On the other hand, clay soils have a small particle size, which holds on to water causing it to pond. Loam soils are a mixture of sand, silt and clay. Loam is the best type of soil for plant growth because the mixed size of soil particles holds the proper amount of water, air, and nutrients.

Organic matter is

another important aspect of soil health. Organic matter generally makes soils darker in color. An organic rich soil holds many nutrients that could be available to plants.

The availability of nutrients depends on many factors, including the amount of moisture. In Michigan we have some organic soils that are too wet to support the growth of the majority of plants. These soils can be found in wetlands where specialized plants that “like their feet wet” can grow. In fact, a good portion of Washtenaw County was wetland in pre-settlement times. In the early 1800’s land throughout the county was tilled and drained to lower the water table. This allowed the soils with high organic matter and nutrients to become productive farmland.

The Soil Survey of Washtenaw County was published by the USDA in 1977 in partnership with the

Soil Conservation Service (a predecessor to NRCS). To perform this extensive survey, soil scientists took many samples and dug deep holes to look at the horizontal soil profiles. Fortunately, soils usually change very slowly, so this survey can still be used today, although it was conducted over 40 years ago. This survey is extremely detailed and lists the types of soil series that can be found throughout the county in addition some possible land uses or management techniques for the different soil types. For example, it warns that many of the soils in Washtenaw County require artificial drainage to be farmed, but that this should be avoided in low-lying areas to protect wildlife habitat. It also cautions against soil erosion on steep slopes and suggests best management practices such as cover crops, contour tillage, and wind breaks.

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“There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery and the other that heat comes from the furnace.”

- Aldo Leopold

Soils (cont.)

If you are looking for information on the specific soil type that you have, you can consult the official Soil Survey of Washtenaw County. You can find a PDF copy of the soil survey for free online from NRCS (https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_MANUSCRIPTS/michigan/washtenawMI1977/washtenawMI1

977.pdf). Hard copy books or CD-ROMS can also be purchased from the Conservation District office for \$15. Conservation District can also direct to resources for soil testing, which can help you determine which nutrients your soil is lacking. If you are a producer interested in MAEAP, the district may be able to provide soil tests at no cost to you.

Why Test Your Well Water?

By Hannah Bradshaw

Testing your well water may seem like a daunting task, however it is simple, easy, and important for making sure that your water quality is consistent. Private wells aren't tested by the EPA, so it's up to you to manage your water quality. Residential water should be tested so that it is safe for drinking at least once a year, but preferably once each season because of changes in the weather (four times a year). Getting your well water tested will help determine if there are contaminants or high nitrate levels, both of which could be health concerns.

For farmers, testing well water is important especially when livestock drink the water, but also to know what minerals are being used to irrigate your plants. This may require adjustments in water treatments, fertilizer, and planting.

Get our well water tested for free on August 14th at the Conservation District Office (7203 Jackson Rd, Ann Arbor, MI). Details on page 3 of this newsletter.

Fall Tree Sale Update By Megan DeLeeuw



White Spruce



Norway Spruce



White Pine



Balsam Fir



White Cedar

Spring is typically the most popular season to plant new seedlings and transplants, but fall can also be a good time to increase your tree cover and get a head start for next year's growing season. The Washtenaw County Conservation District has offered a fall tree sale for many years now and will again offer a variety of trees for sale on Saturday, October 13th at the Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds. Pick up will be from 10 am - 2 pm.

This fall's selection will include: white Cedar, balsam fir, white pine, norway spruce, and white spruce transplants (available singly or in bundles of 10). We will also offer a selection of bulbs, and planting aids (tree stakes, shelters, weed mats, etc). Stay tuned for more details. We begin accepting orders in mid-August.

MAEAP Updates from Technician Nick Machinski

Well Water Screening Event

The Conservation District and MAEAP will be holding a well water screening event at 7203 Jackson Rd. Ann Arbor, MI, 48103 on Tuesday, August 14 from 8am – 3pm. This testing is for private wells only and will testing for nitrate and/or nitrite contamination. The test is completely free!

Samples must be less than 48hrs old and an information sheet will be provided, upon drop-off, to be filled out.

Please follow the steps below for collecting and submitting your water sample.

1. Pick a tap that supplies water that has not run through any treatment devices (water softener, carbon filter, etc.). An outdoor faucet often works well.
2. Run the water for 20-30 minutes before collecting the sample. This will give the pump time to flush the water pressure tank and plumbing so you can collect a valid sample. Disconnect any hoses before collecting the sample; do not sample through a hose. Rinse the sample bottle and lid thoroughly in the water to be sampled; then fill and cap the bottle.
3. Label the bottle clearly with your name, the sampling date, and the well name (cottage well, Mom's well, etc.) using a waterproof pen.
4. Keep the sample dark and cold (on ice or refrigerated) until it is dropped off.

All results are confidential. You will be mailed a copy of your results in 6 to 8 weeks, with information about what to do if the concentration of nitrate or nitrite is too high. If you have any questions, please contact Nick Machinski at (734)-761-8789 ext. 1218.

Field Events

Center for Excellence: Lenawee County will be hosting its annual Center for Excellence on Wednesday, August 8th. To register contact the Lenawee Conservation District at: (517)-263-7400. This is a Phase 1 event for MAEAP.

Field to the Great Lakes: The Lake Erie Water Quality Conference will be on Friday, August 10th at the Stone Lab in Put-in-Bay. If you want to attend this event to learn more about the health of Lake Erie and what you can do to protect it, please contact Amy Gilhouse at: (517) 673-1655 or at Crossroadsfarm@yahoo.com. This has been a Phase 1 event for MAEAP in the past.

Farm Tour: The Washtenaw County Conservation District is putting together a Farm Tour to visit several area farms who have successfully gone through the MAEAP process. We will be exploring their farms and their thoughts on MAEAP. If you ever thought about going through MAEAP this is a great opportunity to see what its like to go through the process of becoming MAEAP verified. The event will be held on Tuesday, August 28th but space will be limited. Registration opens soon. Contact the Conservation District at 734-761-8789 for more details.



OSU Stone Lab

Invasive Species of the Month:

Japanese Knotweed



Japanese knotweed is one of the fastest spreading invasive species in Michigan. Difficult to eradicate, the species is resilient to most removal techniques. The plant is strong and harmful, it can grow through house foundations and asphalt driveways. Mowing knotweed will only spread the plant, and certain herbicides will help the plant grow. Spraying the plant with specific herbicides after the plant has flowered in September or October can be effective. More specific information can be found in the Michigan DNR's PDF.

https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/knotweed_BCP_372280_7.pdf

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