

Definitions of Some Common Terms

Organic Matter - stuff that came from biological sources (meaning it was once a living thing.)

Compost - Organic matter in a state of decomposition. If you can recognize an ingredient, it is not compost yet.

Humus - Compost or portions of the soil that have fully decomposed - or broken down. No more decay can take place.

Peat Moss - Plant material, such as the sphagnum moss plant, submerged under water in bogs that have broken down to form a type of soil called "peat." Peat forms when plant material, usually in wet areas, is inhibited from decaying fully by acidic and anaerobic (without air) conditions. Once wetted, holds water for plant use.

Vermiculite - an odorless, fireproof mineral substance. Along with another naturally occurring substance, perlite, it's often added to potting soil. Vermiculite provides many benefits, including:

- **Improves aeration:** It loosens the soil so roots can more easily reach down and grow through the soil.
- **Enhances drainage:** Vermiculite [soaks up water like a sponge](#). It holds that water until the soil starts to dry out then releases it. This is good for moisture loving plants but not so good for plants that like dryer soil.
- **Adds permanent soil conditioner:** Unlike compost, which eventually breaks down into the soil, vermiculite doesn't break down. [Compost](#) does add vital nutrients, but if you need to permanently improve drainage, vermiculite is a great solution.
- **Slightly raises pH:** Vermiculite is pH neutral, around 7.0 or so, but because of some compounds found within it, it can slightly raise pH, a plus for acidic soils.
- **Makes other minerals available:** Vermiculite naturally reacts with soil compounds and makes available other nutrients such as calcium, potassium and magnesium.

"Mel's Mix" - contains 1/3 coarse vermiculite, 1/3 local peat moss with phosphate, nitrogen and potassium, 5 unique composts from a local farm including poultry and dairy manures, garden waste, fine wood and leaf mulch, and more; it's loaded with nutrients and minerals.