

Version:1.0 StartHTML:0000000181 EndHTML:0000002882 StartFragment:0000002362
EndFragment:0000002846
SourceURL:file:///localhost/Users/computer/Desktop/obits/barefootfarmer.doc

The subsoiler breaks up the hard packed soil that lies beneath the surface. It's shaft is two feet long and the shoe is two inches wide. When I decided to try to reclaim the flood damage fields, subsoiling seemed appropriate.

First of all I had to remove rocks, fill in holes and even out the land. Driveways got graveled and rock piles were formed. We picked up sticks, and logs, and did a bit of fence repair. The soil was hard.

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It takes a lot of horsepower to pull a subsoiler two feet deep through the ground. Some of the land had lost its top soil, and much still had a covering of stones. But after criss crossing a few times the soil lifted up and I felt better. I love cracking the subsoil, penetrating as deep as I can.

What happens is that a lateral crack opens up on either side of the furrow, raising the earth up on either side of the furrow, raising the earth up a few inches, a foot or more on each side. Loose topsoil falls down there, and spaces for the air are opened up. Plants can then send their roots into places that were previously unaccessable.

Years of plowing at six to twelve inches deep create what is known as a hardpan. You don't need a flood to have hard soil, it's already hard at a foot deep. The garden really benefits by breaking it up deeply with the sunsoiler.

Like all tilling, the soil must be dry for the proper effect. Damp conditions would not only create clods, but the new trench would close back up and the land would not crack. Luckily we had a dry spell so I jumped on it.

After subsoiling, we spread wood ashes and rock phosphate on to help remineralize the land. Then I further leveled and tilled with the chisel plow. Tom came by and plowed with a mold board plow, and this buried rocks and brought up soil.

Compost was spread to reenliven the earth, add organic matter and for fertilizing. I chisel plowed it in with a log drag behind. Then I used a spading machine, which is a special tiller with double-jointed arms that open the soil and leave a nice seedbed.

We made rows and planted a garden. Lettuce was transplanted, and we sowed seeds of squash, beans, cucumbers, okra, herbs and flowers. It's a late garden and could use a rain.

But not too much. Gardening in a flood plain is not recommended. Even though it maybe another 40 years, this land will be flooded again. I need to do something to be able to look at it and not feel sad. So I'm glad about the deep tillage and replanting. But in the long run I'm thinking about grass strips with permanent planting of herbs and berries, so that the top soil is not exposed like it was during the great flood of 2010.