

Soils of Walker, California

This summary is intended to advise gardeners and provides some general guidance to making the most of soils in Walker. Farmers, ranchers, and residents of other parts of Antelope Valley should look elsewhere for information.

Generally, the soils in the valley are being used for their best agricultural purpose. A quick glance at what the adjacent ground is being used for can be highly instructive.

West of Hwy 395

(And West of Meadow Dr.)

Soils in this area aren't really much more than coarse sand. Visually there isn't much difference between it and the decomposed granite used to cover paths and driveways. On the plus side the soil is inert. There is little salt or calcium to be concerned with. But there is also very little potential for holding water or nutrients. In essence, growing in this soil isn't much different than hydroponics.

The excessive drainage of these soils makes drip irrigation hard to pull off. Sprinklers are usually better suited here. If you use drip tape, choose one with a close spacing of emitters.

With enough water, lawns will do fine, as will most landscape plants. But be prepared to water frequently.

If you choose to make a go of a garden in the ground, try to incorporate compost or other organic matter. A cover crop tilled in as a green manure will go a long way toward helping your situation.

A raised bed garden would be an excellent idea, and the only practical way for most gardeners to grow quality root crops.

East of Hwy 395 and West of River

(And East of Meadow Dr.)

These are pretty good soils from a soil chemist's point of view. There is some organic matter, its pH is about 6.4 which is great. There are no salt or calcium issues.

The only real impediment to gardening—and it's a big one—are the pervasive stones. The best use for this soil is probably pasture. With some work a garden patch can be made. That will likely involve some sifting and definitely some back muscles.

I would avoid root crops in stony areas, but above ground crops are doable.

If you've never tilled or dug in stony soil, be advised that tackle football is only slightly less brutal.

East of River

These soils tend to be deep but gravelly soils. Nearer the river and some stretches in the east have some decent areas, many of which are being farmed. Primarily, this is a loamy coarse sand. Sprinkler irrigation will probably be best as sandy soils are excessively drained. Most soils east of the river tend to be chemically neutral and all will benefit from organic matter added to the soil.

If I were searching for the perfect garden soil, I'd keep moving, but gardening certainly can be done. Your biggest challenges will be dealing with cobbles and retention of soil and nutrients. The river and the various streams that feed into it have over the ages created a lot of variability. If you have a good size lot, explore some. You may be surprised to find some pockets of good quality soil.

Some parts of this area are used in irrigated, agricultural production of pasture or alfalfa. If you are on or adjacent to these areas you will have an easier time of gardening.

Sites above the valley on the east side are very similar to areas west of 395 from a gardening perspective. Try raised beds.