

Homeowner's Soil Sampling Guidelines

Effective soil testing provides information on the fertility status of soils within a garden or lawn that can be used for making fertilizer or lime application recommendations, monitoring changes in soil fertility over time and even identifying and targeting low fertility soils within your property.



What you will need:

- ◆ Soil probe or trowel
- ◆ Clean plastic bucket
- ◆ Permanent marker
- ◆ Sample bags (paper bags or zip-top bags)

Soil Sampling for Your Garden or Small Lawn.

- ⇒ Collect subsamples across large areas to ensure the entire garden or lawn is represented. This can be achieved by using a zig-zag pattern of collecting. Each composite sample should consist of 10-20 subsamples spread evenly across the garden or lawn. Collect at least one composite per 25 sq ft. (in lawns or gardens less than 5 acres). If you have a significant change in slope or intend to apply fertilizer specifically to one area, plan to separate subsamples into two buckets for separate analyses.
- ⇒ Remove any residue from the soil surface. This includes grasses, weeds or anything left over from plants in the garden.
- ⇒ If using a soil probe, insert vertically 0-4 inches for pH/liming recommendations, 0-8 inches for fertility analysis. We recommend 4-8 inches for a total analysis of your garden or lawn. If using a trowel, start at a 45° angle and remove the top layer of turf (in lawns). Insert the trowel vertically 4-8 inches deep.
- ⇒ Transfer soil to bucket and move to new location.
- ⇒ Once you have collected the recommended samples, use the trowel to thoroughly mix the soil in the bucket. Be sure to clean your equipment between each sampling area.
- ⇒ Place 1-2 cups of the mixture into your sample bag and label with permanent marker. Include homeowner's name and sample identification ("garden," "lower yard," etc.).
- ⇒ **Excessively wet samples should be allowed to air dry slightly by spreading out on a clean surface. **Never dry a sample in an oven or microwave as this can damage the sample and alter lab results.***
- ⇒ Finally, take your samples to your local Extension Office for lab analysis. The samples are sent off and results are normally back with 10-14 days. NOTE: This is the most common method of sampling, if you have more specific needs speak with your local Extension Educator about other sampling methods.

Soils can be highly variable, even over short distances. Because of this, it is preferable to collect composite samples (a mixture of individual samples, or subsamples, collected from multiple locations and mixed together to form a single composite sample).
