

The Nitty Gritty on Soil Testing

Why soil test?

- Helps to reduce over or under fertilizing, thus increasing the opportunity for better economic returns.
- Helps identify specific pH, salt, or nutrient problems.
- Reduces pollution caused by over application of nutrients.

How often should you take soil samples?

- Take soil samples on a routine basis
 - Yearly for high value crops
 - Yearly for sandy soils
 - Every 3 years for loams and clay soils
- First timers
 - Test first 2 years
 - Decide if every 2 – 3 years is ok from then on
- Diagnosing Problems
 - As soon as visual symptom occurs

What depth should I sample to?

- Lawn & Shrub Beds
 - First 4 inches (don't include thatch and grass in the sample)
- Pasture and Hay Fields
 - First 6 inches (don't include thatch and grass in the sample)

Guidelines for soil sampling lawn and shrubs

- Lawns
 - 12-20 cores per composite sample
 - Random zigzag sampling pattern
 - Remove thatch
- Shrubs and flower/vegetable beds
 - One sample per bed
 - 10 – 15 cores per composite sample
 - Random zigzag sampling pattern
 - Scrape mulch back before sampling
 - Do not sample composted beds

Guidelines for soil sampling Pastures and Hay Fields

- One sample per 5 – 15 acres
- 15 – 20 cores per composite sample
- Random zigzag sampling pattern
- Remove thatch
- **Do Not** sample!
 - Near dung piles

- Areas that are obviously different from the field as a whole. If these areas are large enough you can sample them separately.
- Old fence rows or under trees
- Areas used for manure or hay storage
- Livestock feeding areas
- Where lime was previously stockpiled

Prepare soil sample before shipping

- Breaking or mixing cores in a clean plastic container (never used rusty or galvanized tools).
- Reduce composite sample size to 2 cups.
- Fill out the soil sample information sheet completely. Include information such as crop to be grown and recent lime application amounts.