Collecting A Good Soil Sample

- Soil properties vary from place to place. The sample should be representative of the lawn or garden as a whole.
- Do not sample unusual or non-representative areas.
- Scrape plant debris from soil surface before sampling.
- Sample lawns and gardens to a 6” depth.
- Using a clean bucket and a soil probe or spade, combine cores or slices of soil from at least 15 locations scattered throughout the lawn or garden (see diagram).
- Mix soil thoroughly and fill the sample bag with a pint of the mixture.
- Submit samples to your county Extension office. They will send samples to the OSU Soil, Water and Forage Laboratory for testing.

Web Addresses:
- Ferguson College of Agriculture
  agriculture.okstate.edu
- Department of Plant and Soil Science
  agriculture.okstate.edu/departments-programs/plant-soil/
- Soil, Water and Forage Analytical Library
  agriculture.okstate.edu/departments-programs/plant-soil/soil-testing/

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Visit us at soiltesting.okstate.edu

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What is a soil test?

A soil test is a chemical analysis that estimates a soil's ability to supply nutrients. Results from a soil test allow you to monitor soil chemical conditions, tap existing nutrient supplies, identify nutrient deficiencies, and apply optimum fertilizer amounts.

Based on results from your soil sample, your county Extension educator will provide you with the following information:

• Which fertilizer analysis is best for your lawn or garden. The analysis (percentage of nitrogen, phosphate, and potash) is stated on each fertilizer bag. For example: 25-3-3 contains 25 percent N, 3 percent P₂O₅, and 3 percent K₂O.
• How much of that fertilizer should be applied for each application
• When during the year should each application be made
• Whether your pH is in the proper range, and if not, how much lime is needed to adjust it to the desired range.

Benefits of Soil Testing

• Take advantage of nutrients already in the soil
• Identify nutrients that are lacking in the soil
• Reduce fertilizer applications by applying only what is needed
• Provide a proper balance of plant nutrients
• Adjust soil pH to an optimum level
• Reduce chances of excess nutrients getting into water sources

When should soil be tested?

The best time to evaluate the nutrient status of the soil is during a time when the plants aren't growing, although any time of the year is satisfactory. In any case, it's more environmentally friendly to soil test than to guess about which fertilizers to use. For your soil test to be as accurate as possible, collect the soil sample before fertilizer is applied and use the proper sampling procedures.

Where to find more information

Contact your county Extension office for more information on soil testing. They will submit your samples to the OSU Soil Testing Laboratory and help you interpret the results.

Test Your Soil and Take the Right First Steps Towards:

• A more beautiful lawn
• A more productive garden
• A more environmentally friendly home