Healthy plants need healthy soil

Most people don’t think twice about checking the oil in their vehicle, making sure there’s enough gas in the tank or ensuring the tires are at the proper pressure before heading out on the open road. Gardening is no different. Making sure the soil has everything it needs to grow beautiful flowers, shrubs, trees and lawns is key to success.

Granted, a green thumb is helpful, but one of the basics of gardening is good soil. How does a gardener know if the soil is ripe for successful growing? A quick soil test can let you know whether the soil pH, available nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium exist at desirable levels. It isn’t necessary to test every year, but it’s a good idea to test every three years. This knowledge will provide gardeners with the information needed to properly manage a garden and lawn.

There are many benefits to soil testing, including:

- Taking advantage of nutrients already in the soil.
- Identifying nutrients that are lacking in the soil.
- Reducing fertilizer applications by applying only what is needed.
- Adjusting soil pH to an optimum level.
- Reducing the chances of excess nutrients getting into water sources.

The best time to evaluate the nutrient status of the soil is during a time when plants aren’t growing. Oklahoma State University Extension has soil testing available. More information about soil testing, collecting samples and analyzing results is available online.

Soil samples may be submitted to the county Oklahoma State University Extension office. They will send the samples to the Soil, Water and Forage Analytical Laboratory for testing, and then send the results back with fertilizer recommendations.

Soil samples are analyzed routinely for pH, nitrate nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, while secondary and micronutrients are tested on request. A number of other tests such as soil organic matter content and texture are also available through the lab.

Taking the time to have a soil test done can help produce a lusher lawn, more productive garden and a more environmentally friendly home.