

Soil Testing Instructions

A soil test is an excellent measure of soil fertility. It is a very inexpensive way of maintaining good plant health and maximum crop productivity.

Soil tests for farm fields are \$12.00 per sample sent. Soil tests for lawn and garden are \$23.00 per sample sent.

Please send your soil sample to: Michigan State University, Soil & Plant Nutrient Laboratory, East Lansing, MI 48824-1325

- Using a soil probe, spade, or trowel, and a clean plastic pail, sample in a zigzag fashion throughout a uniform area.
- Take a representative sampling of the soil in the area you are testing, 15-20 sub-samples.
- Sampling depths are as follows:
 - Field Soils - 8 inches
 - Garden Soils - 6 to 8 inches
 - Lawn - 3 inches below turf
- Spread the samples out to thoroughly dry. When dry, combine all samples into a plastic pail and mix thoroughly. Fill the soil sample baggie with about a cup of soil.
- Fill out a Soil Sample Information Form and send it along with your check to Michigan State University.

Soil Testing Frequently Asked Questions

Soil testing is an important diagnostic tool to evaluate nutrient imbalances and understand plant growth. It gives us a basis for application of fertilizer and lime. Testing also allows for growers and homeowners to maintain a soil pH in the optimum range (6.0-7.0), which keeps nutrients more available to the plant for growth. It helps us to protect our environment - we cannot afford to pollute our surface and ground waters by indiscriminate application of phosphorous or nitrogen fertilizers, for example. Lastly, it provides a cost savings to us! Why apply what you don't need? Soil test results provide information about the soil's ability to supply nutrients to plants for adequate growth, and are the basis of deciding how much lime and fertilizer are needed.

What is being tested in a soil sample?

The regular soil test includes determination of soil pH, available phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium levels as well as recommendations for lime and fertilizer. Other soil tests are available at supplemental costs, such as organic matter, zinc-manganese, etc.

How do I know if the test results are accurate?

The lab takes various quality control measures to ensure the accuracy of results. Soil with predetermined nutrient levels is tested every 20 samples to provide an accuracy check. We recommend testing soil every 3 years. If recent results are not consistent with past results, notify your county Extension Educator or the lab within one month to rerun the questioned test.

Why doesn't the regular soil test include nitrogen analysis?

Soil nitrate levels are the best indicator of nitrogen availability. Because these levels fluctuate widely depending on rainfall and soil temperature, the best time to take soil nitrate samples is while the crop is growing within two weeks of supplemental nitrogen applications. A soil sample taken months ahead of this time will not provide an accurate measure of the nitrogen available to the plants.

How does the lab make nitrogen recommendations?

Nitrogen recommendations are based on the past and present crops grown plus the yield goal for the crop to be grown. Less nitrogen is recommended when the previous crop was a legume, because they add nitrogen to the soil.

How soon should I receive test results?

You should receive test results in about two weeks. The analysis takes 3 to 5 working days from the time the lab receives the samples. The results are then emailed / mailed to the Extension Office and to the person sending the sample. Remember, recommendations are in pounds of nutrient needed, not pounds of fertilizer to be applied.

For more information on soil testing call the OSU Extension, Butler County, at (513) 887-3722, or in Middletown at (513) 424-5351, ext. #3722.