HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET

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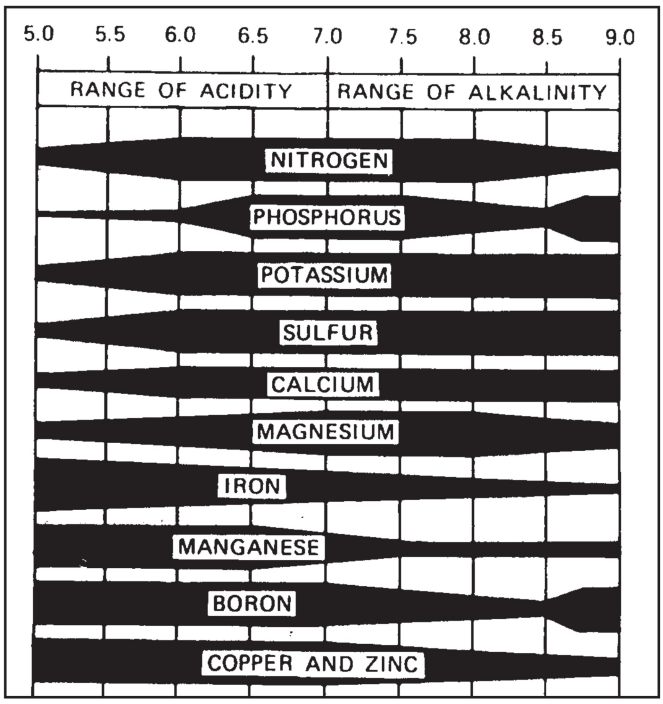
Taking a Soil Sample for a pH Test

A pH test will give you an idea of the relative acidity or alkalinity of a soil sample. It will indicate how much, if any, limestone or acidifying agent must be added to the soil to achieve the proper acidity or alkalinity for the best growth of plants. Many plants have a definite pH range where they grow best. Fertilizer applied to the soil will also be more efficiently used by plants when pH levels are optimum. Soil pH is very important. Certain nutrients are blocked or not available to plants when the pH is too high or too low. The proper pH allows the fertilizer you apply to become available to the plants. If the pH is way out of range, no matter how much fertilizer you apply, it will not be available for the plant to use. Most plants prefer a pH between 6.0–7.0 (6.5 being the optimum mean). Some exceptions are rhododendron, azaleas and blueberries. They prefer a pH between 5.0–5.5. These ericaceous exceptions need iron, which becomes more available at this pH range. (See table below). **It's very important to indicate what plants you plan to grow so the optimum pH range can be determined.**

Remember that a pH test will not solve insect, disease, or some culture problems. If you have a plant problem that you feel is associated with soil pH, bring this to the attention of the person testing the soil. Since it takes limestone three to six months to become chemically active in the soil, it is best to have a pH test done approximately six months **before** planting, i.e. in the fall, after the last garden clean-up. If limestone is required, it may be worked into the top 12" of soil before planting.



Taking the Sample

Soil samples can be taken with a trowel, spade, shovel or soil tube. A soil test is of no real value unless the sample of soil to be tested is a good representation of the conditions as they exist in the soil. This means several random "sub-samples" of each area should be taken and mixed together to give an average or homogenous sampling of the soil. The number of "sub-samples" depends upon the size of the area to be tested (ie. front lawn, back lawn, shade, sun, veg. garden, shrub bed, etc.), it is better to make a composite sample from each area. Label the samples in such a way that you will be able to identify each one when you receive your soil test report.

In sampling the soil of a lawn area, the samples should be taken from **beneath the sod layer.** The samples should come from below the top 4" of soil. Where a bare soil area is to be sampled, such as a flower, vegetable, shrub, or tree bed, the top 4" of soil should be scraped away before taking the sample from the next 4–6" of soil. Make sure to remove any large stones, grass or roots from sample.

Bring a half cup of dry soil in a zip-lock sandwich bag for each test. Label the bags with your name and identify the area (John Smith – front lawn). 2 cups of dry soil are required for other soil tests.

A-1-0 KG revised RT 1/09

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