

Soil Testing for home lawns & gardens

Healthy soil is the foundation of any productive landscape, and knowing your soil is the first step. Soil tests provide information on soil properties and nutrient status. Results help determine the amount and kind of nutrients needed to develop and maintain an attractive lawn and fruitful garden.

What do I need to collect soil samples?

- Trowel, shovel, or soil probe + Clean bucket + Plastic bags + Permanent marker

When and how often should samples be collected?

- Early spring is most common; after the ground has thawed but before any soil disturbances such as planting and fertilization have occurred.
- Avoid sampling very wet or very dry soils.
- Annual soil tests provide the most accurate information, but testing once every three years is sufficient.

Sampling locations and collection

- Divide sampling areas based on distinctly different plant or soil types.
- Using a zig-zag approach, collect enough sub-samples in each distinct area to obtain a representative composite sample. Approximately 5-10 sub-samples (Figure 1).
- Clear the surface of any grass, mulch, leaves, etc. If using a probe, push to the desired depth and then pull out core and place in bucket. If using a trowel or shovel, dig a small hole and cut a thin slice from the side of the hole to the desired depth and place in bucket. The soil 'slice' should be approximately ¼" thick and 2" wide.
- Collect samples to a depth of 4" for lawns and 6" for gardens and other landscape areas.

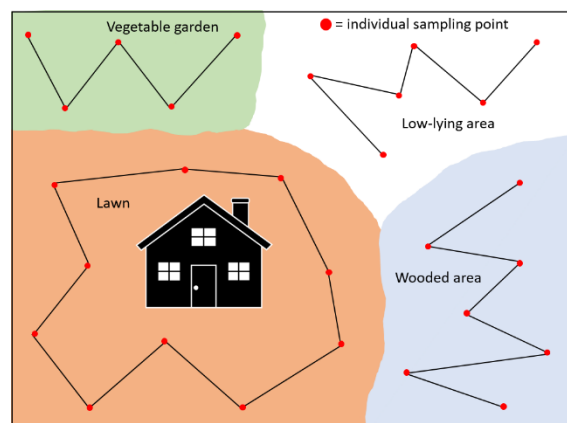


Figure 1. Example sample collection map

Sample handling and shipping

- Once all sub-samples have been collected, mix thoroughly in bucket.
- Transfer about 2 cups of soil to a labeled plastic bag (location, date, etc.) and air-dry soil overnight.
- Package samples in box, fill out a sample submittal form (Form H for lawn, gardens and landscapes), and ship to Agro-One, 730 Warren Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.
- Additional analyses can be added at an extra cost. For further information visit: <http://dairyone.com/analytical-services/agronomy-services/soil-testing/>

How do I interpret my soil test results?

- A single value and rating (very low – very high) will be listed for each soil nutrient. The 'normal' or 'optimal' range for each nutrient will also be given. Comments, including a fertilizer recommendation will be provided at the bottom of the test report.

Any questions? Need help with sample collection? Interpreting test results? – contact Emily Berkowitz, Agricultural Stewardship Specialist (631-740-0268 or el684@cornell.edu)