

How to Collect Soil for Testing

A soil test provides information on the basic fertility of soil. It can not identify insects, diseases, or chemical pollutants and can not answer questions about soil composition, drainage or compaction.

Proper collection of a representative soil sample is important for accuracy and analysis of test results. Follow these steps to obtain a good sample:

1. To collect the soil sample you will need a soil probe, trowel or shovel, and a clean plastic bucket.
2. Identify uniform areas to be tested. For example, a separate soil test should be done on a garden or lawn, or between the front lawn and back lawn if there are noticeable differences. Avoid sampling areas that might give misleading results. If information is desired on these unusual areas, obtain a separate sample for these areas.
3. From each area, take enough samples to properly represent the area – 4 to 5 cores or slices are adequate for the average garden or lawn. Collect a vertical sample starting at the surface of the soil and digging 6 inches deep for gardens and 3 inches for lawns. Remove all plants, sod or thatch from the sample. Mix all the samples thoroughly in the bucket. Bring two cups of the mixed soil to the Extension Office in a resealable plastic bag.
4. Samples should be dry. If wet, air dry. Do not use heat to dry samples.
5. Repeat the sampling procedure above on each area to be tested.