

OSU EXTENSION NEWS

Starting with a soil test

The soil test provides a starting place for a soil improvement program for the home gardener.

Unless you know the problems in your garden soil, you are only guessing when you apply fertilizer. The guessing method in some cases causes you to spend excess money on unneeded fertilizer.

Use a soil probe, spade or shovel to sample the soil profile to a depth of 6 to 10 inches. It is important to obtain a representative sample of the soil in the root zone rather than only the surface soil. It is generally advisable to take several samples (at least 10) around the garden area, and then mix thoroughly in a clean bucket or pail. This gives a representative sample of the entire garden area.

From the pail or bucket, select about a pint of soil. Special soil bags are available from your local County Extension Office. You may also use a clean milk carton, ice cream container or a good plastic zip lock bag. Make sure the container or



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bag is labeled with your name, address, and information on the garden crops to be grown. If you send more than one sample, be sure to clearly label each sample.

If you suspect a particular area in your garden is extremely different than the rest, or if you have a problem area, include that area as a separate sample. Be sure to label the sample as such. Once your soil sample is collected, it will be sent to the Oklahoma State University soil testing lab. Recommendations will then be made on the amounts of fertilizer to use on your garden area. For more information on soil testing contact your local OSU Extension Office.