

SPECIAL SUBMISSION FOR CT COUNTRY
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FALL SOIL TESTING

Farmers and gardeners should always be thinking about how to make their land more productive. One way to be more efficient about production is to test your soil. If you're new to gardening, you may be wondering why you would test the soil. Soil testing is an excellent way to determine the fertility of your soil to maximize crop production and maintain good plant health.

Why should you get a soil test? Soil fertility fluctuates throughout the grazing season during the year. The amount and availability of mineral nutrients is altered by the addition of fertilizers, manure, compost mulch and lime or sulfur, in addition to leaching. As plants grow, a large amount of nutrients are taken out of the soil due to plant growth and development as well as harvesting the plants. A soil test gives you a snapshot of what the soil fertility is like at this particular point in time and tells you what will be needed throughout the growing season to maintain optimum fertility.

Different plants require different soil pH. Taking a soil test and getting specific recommendations for your preferred crop- turfgrass, flowers, ornamental shrubs, vegetables, fruits, grain crops- will help you determine whether your soils is acidic, neutral or alkaline. Having soil at the proper pH allows certain mineral in the soil to be more readily available. When pH rises above 6.5, phosphorous, iron, manganese copper and zinc become less available, and when pH drops below 6.5, manganese can reach toxic levels for some plants.

Having the soil tested takes the guesswork out of fertilizing your preferred crop and makes growing things more cost productive. It eliminates waste and use of unnecessary fertilizers and eliminates over-use, helping to protect the environment.

Soil testing is available through K-State Research and Extension anytime, but fall is an ideal time to test. Testing your soil in the fall eliminates the rush of spring testing, making changes and getting plants in the ground in a timely manner. Testing in the fall also allows the grower more time to make management decisions based on the recommendations. Fall is also a preferred time to test if the grower suspects a pH problem, allowing you ample time to correct the pH if needed. For crop producers, testing in the fall allows farmers to apply potassium and phosphorous at a time when equipment may be more readily available and soil compaction is less of a concern. Fall offers the best opportunity to apply lime as it provides more time to neutralize soil acidity. Based on the soil test results, fertilizer can be purchased prior to the end of the year. Fertilizer is often cheaper in the fall compared to spring, when demand is high. Lastly, the soil testing lab is typically less busy in the fall and results may be received quicker.

It isn't necessary to test the soil on an annual basis. Testing every two to three years should be sufficient. Sample more frequently if you desire to monitor the condition of the soil more closely.

To test your soil collect several samples over the complete area that you plan to plant. Mix all of the samples together and fill a quart-sized bag. Bring the sample to the Cowley County Extension Office located on the east side of the Cowley County Courthouse in Winfield (311 E. 9th Avenue). We will then send the sample to the Kansas State University soil testing lab for analysis. Results are usually complete within 10-14 days and are returned the the Extension Office. The Cowley County Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent will email or mail recommendations to you.

For more information on soil testing, contact the Cowley County Extension Office 221-5450, 441-4565.

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