

WEEKLY NEWS COLUMN
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SOIL TESTING AVAILABLE FOR COWLEY COUNTY

Your local Extension Office offers soil testing procedures for local agriculture producers as well as homeowners. Having your soil tested is a great way to prepare for cropping systems, hay production, vegetable gardens and local fruit production. Soil samples are received at the local level and sent to Kansas State University for analysis. The K-State Research and Extension Soil Testing Lab provides high quality analysis of soil, plant, forage, grain, and water for farmers, homeowners, and researchers.

The KSU Soil Testing lab provides a variety of analyses for producers and homeowners. Most commonly, soil is tested for pH, phosphorous, potassium, nitrate and organic matter. Additional testing can be done to determine calcium, magnesium, sodium, cation exchange capacity, iron, zinc, copper, manganese, ammonium, sulfate, chloride, aluminum, texture, soluble salts and salt alkali. Samples are dried in an oven in the lab and ground using a pulverizing-type grinder. Once the sample has been analyzed and the data has been reviewed, sample sheets with recommendations are provided to the local Extension Agent and shared with the producer.

Soil testing provides a starting place for a homeowner or producer to begin with soil improvement. Unless you know the deficiencies in your soil, you are only guessing when you apply fertilizer. Soil testing can help produce better crops, lawns, and gardens, as well as save money and prevent runoff of excess nutrients. Soil tests should be taken every 2-4 years. Problem soils should be tested every 1-2 years. Testing packages range in price from \$12-\$20 plus shipping cost to the lab.

To receive an accurate soil analysis, soil samples must be properly collected. First, a representative sample of the entire area where plants are to be grown must be collected. Take a sample or core from at least six different areas. Do not include soil from a turf area and a garden area in the same sample. Garden area samples should be sampled from the soil surface to the depth of tillage, which is about 6-8 inches. Tree, shrub and flower beds should also be sampled 6-8 inches deep. Turf samples should be 4 inches deep.

To collect a sample, first, remove debris (such as turf thatch or residue) from the top of the soil before inserting the soil probe, spade or trowel. When using a spade, turn out one spade full of soil and then shave a one inch slice of earth from the side of the hole. Do this in at least 6 different places in the area being tested and mix all the slices together in a bucket to create the average soil sample for the area. If you have several areas to be sampled, keep a record of each area being sampled (i.e., "vegetable garden", "wheat field", "brome trap", etc.). Label each sample with your name, address, phone number, email and the crop you intend to grow.

Soil samples should be delivered to the Cowley County Extension Office located in the east wing of the Cowley County Courthouse in Winfield. Our staff will collect additional information

from you to ensure that the appropriate test is performed to give you information to help you in the growing season.

For more information about soil testing for crops or your home garden, or additional gardening resources, contact the Cowley County Extension Office 221-5450, 441-4565.

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