Don’t Guess…Soil Test!

A soil test can provide information on the proper amount of lime and fertilizer to apply to your lawn, garden and other areas of your landscape. When gardeners apply only as much lime and fertilizer as is necessary and at the appropriate time, nutrient runoff into surface or ground water is minimized, money is saved, and plant health is optimized. Soil testing can also be used to diagnose common nutrient deficiencies for plants that are growing poorly. The reliability of the soil test, however, can be no better than the sample you submit. For results you can depend on, it is vitally important that you take samples correctly to accurately represent the soil in your landscape.

To collect samples use a stainless steel or chrome-plated soil probe, hand garden trowel, shovel or spade. Do not use brass, bronze, or galvanized tools because they will contaminate samples with copper and/or zinc. The soil probe is the best tool for collecting soil samples. The soil probe works better than a shovel or trowel because this tool equally collects soil in a continuous core from the surface through the entire sampling depth with minimal disturbance of the soil. It also allows for faster sampling.

Some of the disadvantages of a soil probe are: it cannot be used when the soil is too wet because the soil compresses; it cannot be used when the soil is too dry because it is difficult to penetrate the soil. Soil probes also do not work well in soils that contain gravel. Soil probes are available through agricultural supply companies or your agriculture Extension agent may be able to help you locate a supplier. Cost is typically $35 or more.

Mix soil samples in a clean, plastic bucket. If the bucket has been used to hold fertilizer or other chemicals, wash and rinse it thoroughly before using it for soil samples. Even a small amount of lime or fertilizer transferred from the sampling tools to the soil can seriously contaminate the sample and produce inaccurate results.

Mix the collected soil thoroughly and place the sample in a soil sampling box that can be obtained at the Extension office along with the proper forms needed to submit samples to the Virginia Tech Soil Sampling Laboratory. Home owner samples are $10 per sample while farm samples are provided free of charge to in-state residents.

You should get results from your test in about one week. Once you get the results, you may bring them into the Extension office or call the office to have the results interpreted. Soil sample results are available to the agents for three years after the sample is completed. We look forward to helping you help keep Smyth County green and growing.

Upcoming Events

Feb 4-6 VCE Winter Conference, Campus

Feb 7 Deadline to consign calves to March VQA Sale

March 3 Smyth Washington Cattleman Meeting, 6:30 PM, 4-H Center, Topic Mineral Nutrition

March 18 VQA Calf Sale

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodation to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at 276-706-8339 /TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.