



SOIL TESTING LABORATORIES

Why Test Your Soil

Soil conditions impact the health, vigor, and productivity of plants. Also, some plants require very specific soil conditions such as low pH for acid loving plants. Knowing the pH of your soil and the nutrients available to support plant growth help you make informed decisions about fertilizer applications and soil amendments. Making good decisions helps to save you money, protect the environment from excessive fertilizer runoff, and provide plants everything they need to grow.

Standard Soil Tests:

Standard soil tests provide information on nutrient levels in the soil, pH, Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) and Organic Matter content. Different soil testing facilities offer different analyses, so it is important to talk with a representative before sending your soil sample in for analysis. Generally, a standard soil test will analyze Nitrogen, Potassium, and Phosphorous content, and in some cases will also include Iron, Sulfur, Magnesium, Zinc, Calcium and soluble salts. Additionally, you must specify if you would like your soil test to include a micronutrient analysis, for which, there is usually an addition charge. Use the results from your analysis to understand what your soil needs to produce healthy plants. Only fertilize or amend your soil if the results of a test recommend it.

Taking Soil Samples:

You should call or go online for instructions from the soil testing facility before taking a sample. Each separate area that will be used for planting should be tested separately. Samples should be labeled with the area from where it was taken (e.g. front lawn, garden beds, side yard flower beds, etc.) **A soil sample will consist of about one quart of soil.**

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The following collection practices will usually suffice, but consult your lab for specific instructions:

- Using a stainless steel or wooden tool, dig down 3-6 inches below the surface and take your sample from that depth.
 - In turfgrass areas, be sure to take the sample from below the root zone of the turf.
- Take a small sample from several locations in the area you want tested. Mix these samples together.
- Place the sample in a paper bag with your name, date, sample location, and the type of planting in the area.
- For the lab to make appropriate recommendations about fertilizer or soil amendments, they will need to know what plants will be grown in that soil.
- Complete the lab's order form and include payment with the package when it is shipped. Ask the soil lab to offer recommendations based on the results of the analysis.

Laboratory Reports May use These Symbols:

Symbol	Stands for	Symbol	Stands for
B	Boron	N	Nitrogen
Ca	Calcium	Na	Sodium
Cl	Chlorine	OM	Organic Matter
Cu	Copper	P	Phosphorus
Fe	Iron	pH	Acidity/alkalinity measure
K	Potassium	S	Sulfur
Mg	Magnesium	Zn	Zinc
Mn	Manganese		

Basic Soil Testing in Spokane County:

The Spokane Conservation District has an in-house soil testing laboratory that offers low-cost soil tests to the public for both urban landowners (lawn & garden) and small acreages of 20 or less acres. The testing offered will include: phosphorous, nitrogen, potassium, pH, and organic matter. A client may go to the Conservation District office to pick up a soil sample kit or may download the Soil Sample Request Form at: www.sccd.org. The lab fee for the basic test is nominal, payable by cash & check only.

For Comprehensive Soil Testing:

Below are links to some of the laboratories in the Pacific Northwest that will test home garden soils for contents more complicated than standard testing would reveal. The prices for this comprehensive soil testing will vary from one lab to another. Most labs provide recommendations for an additional minimal fee. Call or go online for lab prices, soil collecting instructions, and mailing directions.

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This link will take you to more information on how to select the right lab for you:

<http://archive.puyallup.wsu.edu/analyticallabs/instructions>.

This link will take you to the searchable database of laboratories. Please note that this database can be used to search for a wide variety of laboratory services. Most home gardeners are looking for soil fertility tests, which can be found [here](#).