



Flats Mentor Farm

Lancaster, Massachusetts

Guide for taking a Soil Sample

1. What is a soil test?

A soil test is an examination of a soil sample to find out the nutrient content, composition and other characteristics, including contaminants. Soil testing is usually performed to measure the fertility and indicate any deficiencies that need to be treated.

2. Why do you need a soil test?

Testing the soil allows a grower to:

- ✓ Treat the soil problem by finding out what key elements are missing from the soil. When the grower knows what the problem is, the grower will know what element and how much is needed to put into the soil. The grower does not have to guess what elements, lime or fertilizer, are needed to put into the soil and how much is needed.

- ✓ Save money. When a grower tests the soil and knows how much fertilizer or lime to put into the soil, the grower does not over spend on fertilizer or lime. Perhaps, the grower does not need any fertilizer or lime.

- ✓ To protect the environment from too much fertilizer and lime.

- ✓ To improve the soil's nutritional balance.

3. When to do a soil test?

- ✓ Soil testing should be done every 2-3 years.
- ✓ Soil tests can be done in the beginning or after the planting season.
- ✓ Take soil samples from different parts of the field.
- ✓ Avoid areas that have been recently fertilized.

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4. Procedure

1. The soil sample that will be sent in for testing should be a mixture of 12 soil samples taken from different well-defined areas of the plot.
2. Look over your plot and find areas where you will take the soil samples from.
 - ✓ Avoid taking samples where the soil is very wet.
 - ✓ Try to obtain soil sample from center of plot.
 - ✓ Avoid sampling from the edge of plot.
 - ✓ Take soil samples from different parts of plot according to the appearance, uniformity of texture, slope, drainage, color, and past pest and fertility management
3. Using a probe, take soil from the surface through the primary rooting zone of the crop. The rooting depth will vary with crop type. For most plants the top 6-8 inches is appropriate.



Step 1: Using probe, step on probe lower handle and push probe downward into soil.



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Step 2: Pull probe out of soil.



Step 3: Carefully place soil into plastic bag or pail.



4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 and place each of the 12 randomly spaced samplings in a **clean** container (pail or bag) and mix thoroughly. Spread the mixture out on a clean paper to **air-dry** (do not place soil in an oven).
5. Mix the soil again. Obtain a one cup measure of the soil mixture and place it in a zip-lock type bag.

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6. Label the **outside** of the bag clearly with your name, address, for the sample (ID).



7. Take to a soil Lab for testing.

