

Results

A soil test report will be mailed for each sample. For the basic fertility test, about five working days are required from receipt of the sample to mailing a report. When special tests are requested, allow for at least 10 working days for turnaround time. **During busy periods, turnaround time may be longer.**



A copy of your Soil Test Report will be forwarded to the Rutgers Cooperative Extension office in your county. For assistance with the soil test report or soil/plant problems, consult the RCE agent in your county after you receive your report. The phone number will be on your report. Be prepared to discuss the types of plants, site conditions, and soil amendments used.

It all starts with the soil! The proper soil pH and nutrient balance are important for the optimum health and growth of plants. While many other factors also affect success of horticultural efforts - sunlight, availability of water, soil compaction, pest damage, pruning or mowing practices, etc. – starting with good soil conditions is essential and provides the foundation for plant vigor.



Find answers to many of your lawn & gardening questions by visiting the Rutgers Cooperative Extension publications website:

<http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/>



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**RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
N.J. AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK**

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RUTGERS
New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station

Soil Sampling Instructions

for lawn, shrubs, flowers, trees, or home vegetable or fruit garden



Obtaining a representative soil sample is a critical process for accurate soil test results and recommendations.

Please follow these directions carefully.

Also note: Soil sampling instructions are different for lead screening of soil. In that case, see FS336 for instructions.

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Planning

🌿 Sample separately the areas used for different types of plants.

For example, keep samples taken from lawn areas separate from samples taken from flower and shrub areas. Samples from areas with holly, rhododendron, azalea, and other acid-loving plants should be kept separate from samples taken from areas with other types of shrubs. In other words, *most samples should represent only one type of planting*. If more than three types of plantings are selected, the sample probably represents none of them well.

🌿 Also sample separately areas that have received different lime and/or fertilizer treatments in the past.

🌿 Do not sample areas that have been limed or fertilized within the past 6 weeks unless trouble is evident.

🌿 Where poor growth exists, separate samples should be taken from both the bad area and an adjacent good area, if possible.

🌿 To obtain a representative sample, plan to collect multiple subsamples at random locations within each area.



🌿 Each sample must be submitted in a separate soil test kit with the appropriate soil test questionnaire.

Sampling procedure

Hint: For ease of sampling, the soil should be moist, but not too wet. Moisten if necessary; allow to soak in or drain.

🌿 Use a trowel or spade to obtain slices of soil or a soil probe to obtain soil cores from the surface to 6" depth.

If using a trowel or spade, dig a hole to a depth of 6", setting that soil aside. Then from the side of the hole, take a thin slice (about 1") of soil, top to bottom. Trim away sides of the slice to get a 1" wide subsample from top to bottom. Place the subsample in a large plastic bucket.

🌿 Repeat this procedure at 10 - 15 locations within the sampling area, placing all subsamples together in the container. (Exception: in areas smaller than 100 sq ft, 5 - 10 subsamples will be adequate).

🌿 Mix all the soil in the container, breaking up subsamples and any large clods. The goal is to provide an homogenous soil sample, representative of the area. You may allow the soil to air-dry by spreading it out on clean paper or plastic. **Do not heat** to dry the soil. Dry samples reduce processing time as well as mailing costs.

🌿 Place 1 pint (2 cups) of soil in the plastic bag provided and seal with a rubber band or twist tie. Place the sample in the cloth mailer bag and tie securely. Excess soil can be returned to the sampling holes.

Repeat this process for any other areas that you wish to have tested (to be submitted in a separate mailing kit). Do not place more than one sample in a sample bag.

Submitting the sample(s)

🌿 Fill out the soil test questionnaire included with the soil testing kit.

- Provide a complete address, including zip code, and a phone number. Please write legibly.
- If you provide an email address, your soil test report will be sent via email; otherwise, your soil test report will be mailed.
- If you submit more than one sample, provide a name on the "Sample ID" line of the questionnaires for each sample. The sample ID will be printed on the report for you to distinguish between samples. Keep a record of serial numbers, sample ID, areas sampled, and date mailed.
- If you select any test other than the standard fertility analysis, additional payment must be made for the special tests. Enclose a check in the envelope or provide the credit card information requested. *Visa, Mastercard, or Discover only.*
- Fill out the Soil Test Questionnaire found in the kit. Recommendations can be provided for no more than two type(s) of planting, as described earlier. Indicate "established" or "to be planted". Also check off the appropriate selections under "Growing conditions".
- 🌿 Place the completed questionnaire in the envelope attached to the mailing bag. The laboratory's address is on the kit for mailing. For more than one kit, it is less expensive to package them together into a box or sturdy envelope.