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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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SIMPLE SOIL MAINTENANCE

One of the most important and often neglected management chores we overlook is the importance of maintaining the proper soil pH in our home lawns, pastures and hay meadows. The bottom line is a low soil pH can cost us money with wasted fertilizer.

Lime is applied to the soil to increase the soil pH. Soil pH, is a measure of the soil's acidity or alkalinity. Soil pH can directly influence the vigor and quality grass in home lawns. When the pH is below 7.0, the soil is said to be acidic. Most turfgrass in East Texas prefer a soil pH around 6.

Several factors cause the formation of acidic soil conditions. One primary cause is the leaching of nutrients such as calcium, magnesium and potassium from the soil. This occurs more frequently in East Texas due to our heavy rainfall most years or heavily irrigated turfs. A second cause is the use of acidifying nitrogen fertilizers. Most of the fertilizers applied to lawns have the potential to cause acidic conditions. Other factors which may act to reduce soil pH are the decomposition of soil organic matter and irrigation with acidic water.

When the soil pH drops below 6.0 many nutrients necessary for proper growth become less available for use by the grass plants. Nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium; our three basic nutrients, are less available at lower soil pH. For example if the soil pH is 5.0 only 38% of the Nitrogen and 30% of the Potash is recovered by growing grass plants. This will result in very weak, poor stands of grass.

The only way to determine whether or not lime is needed and how much to apply is by having your soil tested. Texas A&M and SFA both offer soil testing services. A basic soil test cost $10. The lab will send you results of the test along with lime and fertilizer recommendations for your specified crop.

Information on submitting a soil test is available at all County Extension offices.

Horticulture Field Day to Feature Hundreds of Flowering Bedding Plants

On June 28, nursery growers, greenhouse managers and gardening enthusiasts can view field tests of flowering bedding plant varieties at the annual Overton Horticultural Field Day.

The field day will begin at 8:30 a.m. at the Texas A&M University System's Agricultural and Research Center's North Farm site. The tour will continue at the North Farm site until about 10:30 a.m., then move to the Overton Center's headquarters building where a demonstration garden is located. Lunch will be served at about 11:30 a.m.

The plant trials were started primarily to serve the bedding plant industry but with the trial's thousands of square feet of plots planted purple, pink, red and white flowers they have become popular with regional gardeners. Because it is such a colorful event, Texas Highways magazine featured the field day in its March 2007 issue.

Registration is free and will include a lunch. The Overton center is located 1 mile north of downtown Overton on State Highway 3053.

The North Farm site is about 4 miles north of the center on State Highway 3053. For an online map, go to http://overton.tamu.edu/flowers/fieldday.htm .