

News release from the Office Of:

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It's a Great Time to Have Your Soil

If your garden performed below expectations last year, or maybe things just didn't grow quite right, a few dollars invested in a soil test may be just the solution. A properly prepared and fertilized garden soil is the real key to successful gardening in most areas of Texas. You can't look at the soil, taste it, smell it, or feel it to tell whether your soil is low in nitrogen, high in phosphates, or maybe just right. One sure way to overcome the mystery, and avoid confusion when it comes time to purchase fertilizers, is to have your garden soil tested.

Why is it important to know how much phosphorus or nitrogen is in the soil, or what the pH of the soil is? The answer is simple. Vegetables don't do well in improperly fertilized soil, whether it be too fertile or not fertile enough.

The soil test report will tell you the level of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium available to your garden plants. It will also indicate the pH (acidity or alkalinity) of your garden soil. For the most part, this is all you need to know to properly fertilize your garden soil, and insure a bountiful harvest.

To take a soil sample, make a hole about a foot deep in the garden with a spade or sharpshooter. Throw out the first spadefull of soil. Then, from the back of the hole, cut a slice of the soil ½ inch to 1 inch thick. Be sure the slice is at least 6 to 7 inches in depth, with fairly even width and thickness. Then place the soil slice in a plastic bucket or tub. Repeat this procedure 4 to 6 times in different spots in the garden, depending primarily on the size of the garden. Thoroughly mix the composite of the soil, and mail it to the Soil Testing Laboratory here at Texas A&M University or Stephen F. Austin State University. Soil testing is a service provided by the University; soil test kits, with instructions, can also be obtained from the County Extension Office.

If a soil sample is taken in late winter or very early spring, you should expect to get your results back within 2 weeks. If you wait until spring, then it may take considerably longer

to get your results back. An adequate soil test, properly done and properly interpreted, will go a long way toward insuring a bountiful harvest from this spring's garden.

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