

# Soil Testing <sup>1</sup>

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## Why Soil Test?

Lime and fertilizer are essential for good crop production. Soil testing helps you manage those production inputs.

## Can You Answer These Questions?

1. What is the pH of your soil?
2. What are the fertility levels of the principal nutrients?
3. How much and what kind of lime does your soil need?
4. Which nutrients need to be added to your soil as fertilizer?
5. How much fertilizer is needed for your crop and soil?

If you cannot answer these questions, a soil test may help.

However, a soil test can't:

1. Tell you which crop to grow.
2. Prevent poor crops caused by drought, disease, insects, too much water, etc.
3. Substitute for proper cultural practices.
4. Take the place of good management.

## How to Take a Soil Sample

1. See your county agent for complete information.
2. Divide farm into fields or areas for sampling. Sample separately areas with different crop growth, soil color, or lime or fertilizer histories.
3. Don't sample areas too small to be fertilized or limed separately. Don't sample unusual areas. Avoid wet spots, feeding areas, burn piles, old fence rows, sand boils, etc. The sample you collect should be the average of the field or area sampled.

4. Proper sampling tool is important. Use sampling tube or auger. If necessary to use shovel or trowel, dig a V-shaped hole in the soil 6 inches deep, and slice 1-inch slab off one side of hole. Lift out and save center 1-inch wide strip of soil.
5. Take a core (with sampling tube) of soil 6 inches deep from at least 15 spots in each field or area to be tested. Sample lawns only to a 3 inch depth. Mix together the cores from one field or area. Put about a pint of the mixed soil in a soil sample bag.
6. Identify samples by letter or number. Make a sketch or record of some kind so you will know which sample came from which field.
7. Fill out an information sheet and include it and payment in box with samples.
8. Send samples to the laboratory for analysis. Shipping boxes are available from county Extension offices.
9. Consult with county agent if help is needed with interpretation of test results or fertilization recommendations.

## **FOLLOW THE RECOMMENDATIONS!**

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### **Footnotes**

1. This document is Circular 239, one of a series of the Soil and Water Science Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published September 1978. Last reviewed September 2003. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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