

Taking a Soil Sample

Proper interpretation of soil test results depends upon collecting a representative sample of the soil. Soil samples can be taken at any time of the year, although spring and fall sampling are usually the most convenient. Separate samples should be collected from areas that differ in soil texture, soil color, the kinds of plants previously grown, and previous applications of fertilizer, organic amendments, and lime.

Samples are most easily collected using a soil tube, soil auger, or a garden trowel or spade. Scrape off all surface vegetation or litter and take the sample to the desired depth. Standardized sampling depths are as follows:

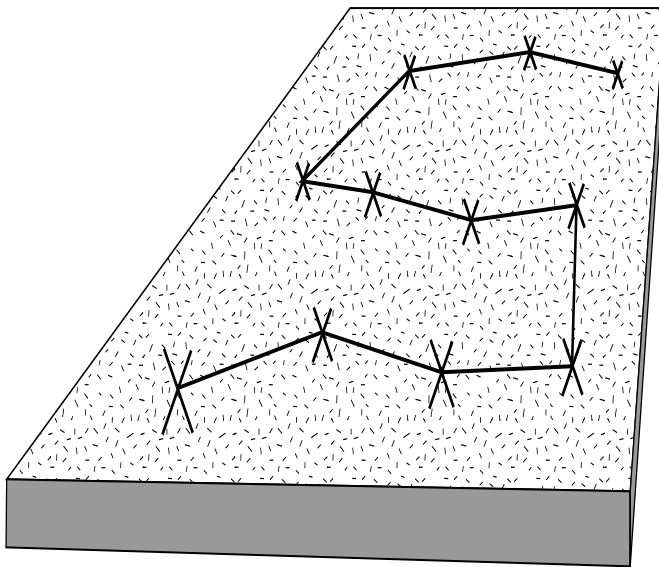


Figure 1. Soil sample collection for a lawn or garden.

- Sample garden soils and soils to be used for establishing a lawn or turf to a depth of 6 inches.
- Sample established turfgrass to a depth of 3 inches.
- For trees and shrubs, sample to a 12 inch depth.
- Soils sampled for lead because of health concerns with young children, should be sampled separately to a depth of 3/4 inch or to the depth to which a child may be exposed.

Each soil sample should be a composite of subsamples collected from randomly selected spots within the chosen area (**Figure 1**). Take 5–10 subsamples for relatively small areas (less than 1000 square feet) in home lawns, flower borders, and gardens. Take 10 to 15 subsamples for larger turfgrass areas like industrial grounds and athletic fields. Collect the subsamples in a clean plastic pail, mix the soil thoroughly, and put about one pint of this mixture in a sample bag or box. Label the sample container and keep a record of the area represented by each sample taken. Samples can be sent directly to the University of Minnesota Soil Testing Laboratory, 135 Crops Research Building, 1902 Dudley Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108. Sample submission forms and other soil testing information can be obtained online at <http://soiltest.cfans.umn.edu/>.

Addresses of other commercial soil testing laboratories can be obtained from your local Extension office or consult the yellow pages of your phone book.