

## **Soil Testing, NOW**

By Charles W. Marr, Kansas State University

We usually think of testing soil in the spring, but there are several good reasons for testing now. Not much will change before spring as far as pH, phosphorus, potassium and organic matter are concerned. Testing now will allow you to apply fertilizer now or early in the spring if needed. And you should have results quickly because soil-testing laboratories are not as busy this time of year.



Begin by taking a representative sample from several locations in the garden or lawn about 6-8 inches deep. Mix the samples together in a clean container and select about one cup of soil. Take the soil to your county extension office to have tests done at the K-State <or your local agriculture university> soil testing laboratory for a small charge. If your garden has performed well and you suspect that soil fertility is adequate, a soil test is not necessary. Use a soil test only in cases where you suspect a problem. A soil test determines fertility problems, not other conditions that may exist such as poor drainage, poor soil structure, soil borne diseases or insects, chemical contaminants or damage, or shade with root competition from other plants. All of these conditions may reduce plant performance but cannot be evaluated by a soil test.

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