Instructions for Taking Lawn and Garden Samples

Soil tests are only as accurate as the samples submitted for analysis. Therefore, proper collection of soil samples is extremely important. You can use any bag you have on hand, we recommend a Ziploc Quart storage bag for submitting your soil samples. Please do not use any type of cloth bag.

1. Obtain at least one separate composite sample for each acre, or less if conditions vary. For lawns, one composite sample is sufficient, or at most one each from front and back lawn. A composite (representative) sample consists of up to 15 cores.

2. Obtain a separate composite sample for each different soil type. Difference in soil type can be noted by texture, color, drainage, and slope.

3. For each composite sample use a soil probe, soil auger, spade, or garden trowel and obtain a small core of soil from at least 10 to 15 different places in the same area. Place the cores in a clean bucket and mix well. Take about 2 to 3 cups of soil and place in Ziploc bag to submit for testing.

4. To obtain the core, scrape away the surface litter. With one of the tools mentioned above, take a small core from the plow layer (0 to 6 inches deep) for vegetables and flowers and place in bucket.

5. In lawns and other established turfgrass areas, take the cores to a depth of 3 inches below the sod. Do not include the "sod" plug or cap in the sample.

6. Label each sample bag with a number and your name. Number the samples in consecutive order as 1, 2, 3, etc. Keep a record of these numbers.

7. Samples should be sent to Solum Labs in a field moist condition. Do not dry the samples before mailing.

8. Mail the samples to Solum Labs within 24 hours after they are taken. If this is impossible, put the samples in the refrigerator or deep freeze until they can be mailed.

9. Be sure to keep a record for yourself of the area from which the samples were taken. This sheet will not be returned to you.

10. Visit www.agron.iastate.edu/soiltesting for additional instructions on how to take samples.

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