

GET A SOIL TEST

Serious gardeners know that stressed out plants are no better off than stressed out people. Under stress due to lack of water or lack of proper nutrition, any plant can succumb to the elements before you realize it. Soil testing is the best way to check on what food is available to the plant and what action you need to take to convert your dirt to beautiful rich loamy soil.

Soil test are available through the NC Department of Agriculture Soil Testing Lab and are paid for by our tax dollars. The lab is located at 4300 Reedy Creek Road, Raleigh NC 27607-6465 near the NC Museum of Art on Blue Ridge Road, phone (919) 733-2655;

Use this website for department information, downloadable forms and supplementary information. <http://www.agr.state.nc.us/AGRONOMI/sthome.htm>

The key element of the soil test is the pH check which instructs you as to how much lime to apply to your garden. Typically we are looking for a pH of 6.0-6.5 on a scale of 1 to 14 – acid to alkaline. Our soils (piedmont NC) are on the acid side typically in the range of 4.0 to 5.5 and lime is applied to pull the pH into the 6-6.5 range.

In this pH range plants have the best opportunity to take the necessary nutrients from the soil that they need to thrive.

STEPS IN TESTING YOUR SOIL

1. Define the test area(s) by sampling all the different soil types you identify on your property. Soil can vary across the property from the upper woodland shade to the low area defined by the erosion of top soil to this part of your land.
2. If you are locked on the location for a vegetable garden for example, define that space and sample to a depth of six to eight inches or where the roots will concentrate. Make several samplings with the shovel or trowel and mix these in a clean bucket for a representative sample from the vegetable bed.
3. From the bucket you will only need a cup or so for the sample as the lab will use very little of your soil. Let the soil dry first if very wet, then transfer to a plastic bag or one of the boxes supplied by the Soil Testing lab. You can transfer your soil outside of the lab at the time you deliver it if you do not already have the sample boxes. Be sure to identify the location of each bag of soil you want tested so that the report you receive will accurately note the requirements for each of your test areas.