

# Soil Testing for the Homeowner



*Take the guesswork out of liming and fertilizing your landscape. Read on to learn how to take a good soil sample.*

## Getting a Representative Soil Sample

Soil is highly variable. Hydrangea flowers, like the one pictured here, illustrate how small distances translate to big soil differences. Hydrangea flower color is impacted by soil pH. Acidic soil conditions favor blue flowers, and basic soils contribute to pink flowers. This plant has both blue and pink flowers, indicating a measurable jump in soil pH just in the root zone of one plant! This highlights just how important it is to sample from several locations in the designated area. One scoop of soil does not accurately represent your entire yard.

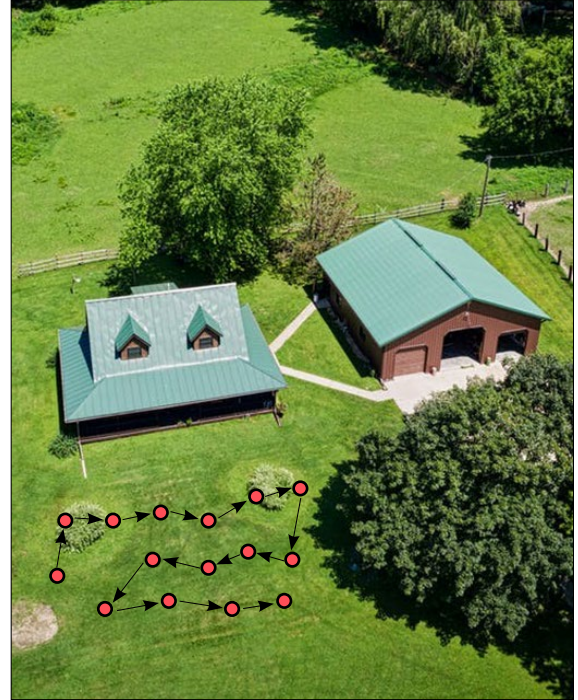


Define the area to be tested: In the picture above, the homeowner divides the property into three different areas. Each area requires its own soil sample box.





Gather the supplies you need: soil probe, spade or shovel, plastic bucket, and sample boxes.



Collect 15–20 different soil plugs from different places in the defined area. Remove vegetation/turf from the ground surface before collecting plugs.



Take soil from the top 4–6 inches.



Mix all plugs from a designated area together in a plastic bucket.

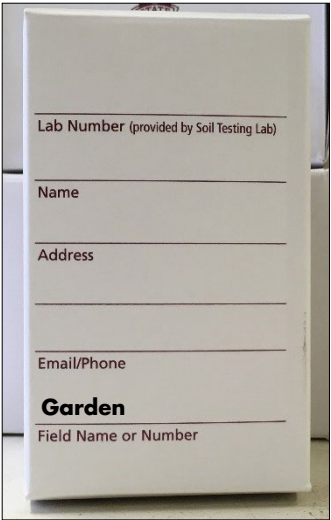
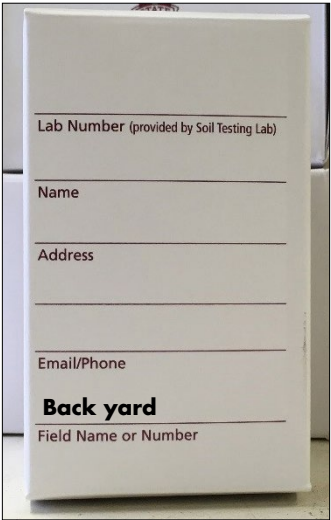
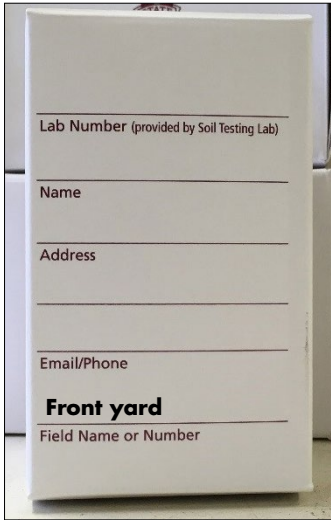




Fill a soil sample box with soil from the bucket.  
 If a box is not available, quart-sized zip-top bags are also an option.



In addition to the other information on the box, remember to label the sample name.



If you have multiple areas that need sampling, repeat the entire collection process.



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## Soil Testing Laboratory

Please print clearly and press firmly so all copies will be readable.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ MS County (where soil was collected) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

(Please provide an email address to receive results faster)

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Banner account no. (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

### Paying with a credit card?

Skip filling out this form and enter all information online!

Go to:

<https://register.extension.msstate.edu/soil-testing-laboratory>

### Cost per sample

Payment must accompany samples. A service charge of \$30 will be applied to all returned checks.

☐ Soil test\* \$8

☐ Soil test + organic matter + % nitrogen\*\* \$10

☐ Organic matter + % nitrogen only\*\*\* \$4

Number of samples \_\_\_\_\_

Total charges \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Check no. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Money order no. \_\_\_\_\_

Grower sample ID (5 spaces max)									
Crop to be grown (use codes on last page)									

Mail this form with payment for total charges to:

MSU Extension Service  
Soil Testing Laboratory  
Box 9610  
Mississippi State, MS 39762

\*Standard soil tests on samples include: pH, lime requirement, CEC, phosphorous, potassium, calcium, magnesium, zinc, and sodium. Horticulture samples include Total Soluble Salts (TSS).

\*\*Organic matter calculated based on % carbon (OM = %C \* 1.72).

\*\*\*Nitrogen determination does not factor in fertilizer recommendation.

Mail the top two pages to the lab with your sample. The final page (pink) is the customer receipt.

**Grower sample ID** – How you will distinguish multiple samples (ex., lawn vs garden).

**Crop to be grown** – Look on the back page of the soil sample form for code numbers associated with the crop you want to grow (ex., enter code # 17 for home vegetable garden).

Fill out the Soil Testing Laboratory sample form. Soil sample boxes and forms are at your local county MSU Extension office. Each county in Mississippi has an Extension office, so there is one near you!

Take the soil sample(s) to your local Extension office or mail them directly to the MSU Soil Testing Lab at P.O. Box 9610, Mississippi State, MS 39762.

Include payment with your sample (\$8 per sample), or pay for samples online at [extension.msstate.edu/lawn-and-garden/soil-testing](https://extension.msstate.edu/lawn-and-garden/soil-testing).

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