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.
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.