How to Take and Submit a Soil Sample

Things to know prior to submission:

- Each sample should represent only one area – for example, a lawn, vegetable garden or perennial landscaped area.
- Use proper sampling tools – if a soil probe or augur is not available, use a garden spade or shovel. Do not use galvanized tools, as they may contaminate the sample.
- For each unique area take at least 10 – 12 cores – see illustration below.
- Submit samples from healthy and unhealthy areas separately.
- Sample lawns to a depth of 4-6 inches.
- Sample shrubbery & perennial beds to a depth of 4 – 6 inches taking care to avoid zones where lime or fertilizer has been applied recently.
- Sample annual vegetable and flower beds to the depth that you plan to incorporate lime or fertilizer.
- Place all cores for one unique area in a clean plastic bucket and mix well. Fill the soil sample box about 2/3 full (about 2 cups).
- Avoid extremely wet soil conditions unless absolutely necessary. If it is necessary to sample wet soil, spread the sample in a thin layer on an aluminum pie pan, clean wrapping paper or waxed paper, and allow to dry at room temperature. A fan may be used to speed this process. Do not use heat to hasten drying. DO NOT send wet samples to the laboratory for analysis. They may leak in the mail, provide inappropriate results, and delay analysis.
- For frequent soil testers: Establish a regular sampling time. For most crops, the soil should be sampled every 2 to 3 years. For soils under intensive use, as in high-value cash crops or where nutritional problems persist, the soil should be tested prior to planting each crop. Fields should be tested at approximately the same time of year.

How to take your soil sample:

1. Make sure soil is sampled to the desired depth as described:

   - **Home gardens** ordinarily require samples taken to the tillage depth (from 6 – 10 inches deep). To use a spade for sampling:
     - Dig a hole to the desired depth.
• Cut a ½ inch thick slice of soil from the face of the hole and trim both vertical sides of the slice so as to obtain a strip of soil about 1 inch wide from top to bottom.

**For lawns,** a sample from the upper four to six inches of soil is satisfactory. Thatch and other visible plant residue should be removed.

**For deep rooted tree and fruit crops,** two samples should be sent to Agro-One:

- A surface soil sample from 0-8 inch depth.
- A subsoil sample from 8-24 inch depth.

Samples should be sent in separate containers, with a completed information sheet for each sample. Ensure that BOTH samples are properly labeled and recorded on each information sheet in order to keep the samples together for analysis and recommendations output.

2. Prepare your sample(s) for submission. Ensure they are dry, at least 1.5 – 2 cups in volume, and sealed in a plastic bag. Fill out the appropriate information sheet, provided with your Agro-One sample box. Be sure to write legibly and include all contact information, crop codes, county of origin and other necessary information. Recommendations may not be accurate if information is missing or incomplete. Also be sure to keep a record of each sample for your future reference or if additional testing is necessary. **Ship Your Samples to:**

   Agro-One  
   730 Warren Road  
   Ithaca NY 14850  
   Phone: 1.800.344.2697  

Samples can be shipped via U.S. Mail, UPS, Fed Ex, DHL, etc. Selecting these carriers will require additional packaging and will incur additional shipping and handling costs. If using the USPS, the flat rate boxes will be your most economical way to ship samples.

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**Assisting you with your desire for a Soil Sample**

Keith Severson, Extension Educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension Cayuga County or a Master Gardener are normally on hand to answer questions about the important aspects associated with soil testing.

If you are unfamiliar with the soil testing process, you may want to delay sending in a paid sample to Agro-One until you are sure you have taken a proper representative soil sample, have become familiar with and are able to properly fill out the Agro-One lab form so that you receive the proper fertilizer recommendations for the plants or crop that your are trying to grow.

Keith or the Master Gardener might also be able to assist you with selecting a fertilizer and calculating the amount to use after you receive the results of your soil test.

Please call Keith at 315-255-1183 ext. 225 for soil sampling inquiries or a Master Gardener at 315-255-1183 ext. 228 for all home and garden inquiries. Master Gardeners are available Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. until Noon during the growing season - May 1 through mid-October. Leave a message if they are not in. Please call for assistance anytime during the soil testing process - sampling, form completion, or results interpretation phases so that we can assist you in any manner for a successful growing season!