When is the Best Time to Take Soil Samples?

Test your soil and improve the health of your lawn, garden, or landscape.

Testing your soil now will capture your fall analysis before the start of winter.

Soil samples can be taken any time throughout the year. It is important though to sample approximately the same time of the year. Late summer, or early fall, is a good time for most crops. This allows time for lime recommended to react and change the pH before the crop is planted. Collect soil samples 3-6 months before planting.

Healthy plants begin with healthy soil. Think of a soil test like the laboratory tests you get when you have your annual physical at the doctor’s office. Getting your soil tested gives you a baseline of information.

Why should we care about soil pH? It is the master variable of soil fertility. Managing it well helps prevent some element toxicities that hamper plant growth or even kill them. In limed soil, some nutrients are more available for the plants to use. Fertilizer efficiency (that is how effective it is) is better. Plant roots grow more in limed soil, so the pants can obtain more water and nutrients.

In simple terms increasing the pH to the optimal amount for the plants you are trying to grow will improve their nutrition, and thus their health.

Soil sampling should be repeated periodically. Even if you adjust your soil’s pH upward with lime, over time it will again trend downward due to rainfall, plant root activity, fertilizer reactions, and other factors. I recommend sampling during the same season so you can compare results over time.

Healthy soils function as a vital, living ecosystem to sustain plants, animals, and humans. Maintaining and building healthy soils is the foundation of farming systems to supply food and fiber to the world.

Soils provide plants with mineral nutrition, water storage, and physical support with growth. Soils maintain the quality of the air and water. Ultimately, soils support life.

Healthy soils provide a multitude of services that simultaneously benefit agriculture and the environment. Moreover, healthy soils benefit all farmers, from small vegetable gardeners to large row-crop operations. Healthy soils offer many benefits.

1. Enhanced organic matter and soil organisms improve soil structure, aeration, water retention, drainage, and nutrient availability for plant growth.
2. Increased organic matter enables soil to hold more water and reduce runoff.
3. Favorable soil water retention, combined with nutrient management practices, prevents nutrients from contaminating water bodies, thereby protecting water resources and aquatic habitats.

Healthy soil is important for continued food and fiber production. However, building and maintaining soil health, particularly organic matter, requires management commitment and execution.