Soil testing

Source: Alexis Sheffield, UK extension horticulture agent

Soil testing is a soil-management tool we use to determine the fertility of soil as well as the optimum lime and fertilizer requirements for crops. Fall is the best time of year to test your soil. Most nutrients take some time to break down and become available to the plant. If you give them all winter to break down, by the time you are ready to plant in the spring, the plants can better take up the nutrients.

All Kentucky county extension offices offer help with soil testing. Just bring a soil sample to your county extension office and they will send it to UK’s Division of Regulatory Services and within a few days you will have the results. Testing doesn’t cost much and you may use the results for everything you grow from trees and flowers to fruits and vegetables.

When taking a soil sample, remember plant have shallow roots that lie within the top 6 to12 inches of soil. Use a trowel to dig down about 6 to 8 inches and collect approximately two cups of soil per sample. Put the sample in a plastic bucket since a metal bucket may taint the results. When you bring the sample to your county extension office, they will put it into a soil test bag along with some information you provide and soon you will your test results. It will save you some money and it is good for the environment.

As a rule, you should test sandy-textured soils every 2-3 years and clay soils every 3-4 years. However, if problems occur during the growing season, send in a soil sample for analysis.

Contact (YOUR COUNTY) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service for information on soil testing.

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