SDSU Extension

agronomy

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SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY®
AGRONOMY, HORTICULTURE & PLANT SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

Taking a Lawn and Garden Soil Sample

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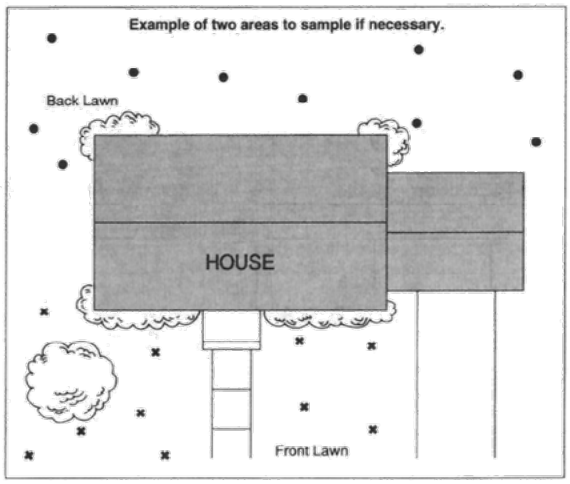
Proper collection of soil samples is extremely important as the accuracy of the soil test depends on the quality of the soil sample provided to the soil-testing lab. Follow the directions below to obtain a good soil sample.

When to Soil Sample

1. Soil samples may be taken any time during the year. However, if soil is frozen or too wet, obtaining a good soil sample is difficult

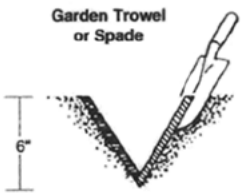
Where to Soil Sample

1. If the area is fairly level and appears to be uniform, collect a composite sample.
2. If your lawn or garden has large areas which seem to differ in fertility, take one composite soil sample from each area. For example, you may want to sample the front lawn separately from the back lawn (see diagram).
3. Do not include soil from a lawn and a garden in the same composite sample.
4. Avoid (or sample separately) trouble spots or areas such as borders, low spots, areas near trees or buildings, etc.



Taking a Soil Sample

1. Depth of the soil sample depends on the plants that are or will be grown. For example:
   a. Existing Grass: 0 to 3 inches
   b. New Grass Seeding: 0 to 6 inches
   c. Gardens: 0 to 6 inches
   d. Trees and Shrubs: 0 to 12 inches
2. Use a garden trowel, spade, sampling tube, or auger. First, scrape away or discard any surface mat of grass or litter. Second, sample the lawn and garden areas to the depth indicated above.
3. Place the soil in a clean container. Repeat sampling process in 10 spots within each sampling area. Mix soil well to make a composite (mixed) sample. Take out one pint of soil to send to the soil-testing lab. Make sure to find and follow the soil sample labeling requirements of the soil-testing lab where you will be sending your soil samples.
4. It is best to air dry the soil sample before mailing and not to use heat for drying.



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