

# Soil Tests Are Essential For Productive Gardens, And Fields

**GALENA, MO.**

A person can't tell whether a field or garden has too much phosphorus or too little organic matter simply by smelling and touching the soil.

But, if you take a sample of the soil to the nearest University of Missouri Extension center, the soil can be tested to determine what is needed to maximize the soil's potential.

With fertilizer costs on the rise, the results of the test will save the landowner or gardener money.

"When planting time arrives, will you wonder if you are putting the right amount of lime and fertilizer to your lawn, garden or field? If so, it is time to take a soil sample before you plant a crop or garden this spring," said Tim Schnakenberg, agronomy specialist, University of Missouri Extension. "A soil test should be the basis of any fertilization program."

## **LEARN ONLINE**

For more information on soil testing, contact your local University of Missouri Extension Center. The Greene County Extension Council has also established a page online called "Soil Test Central" which contains information about collecting and submitting soil. That new webpage can be found online at <http://extension.missouri.edu/greene>.

A soil test provides information on the nutrient levels (potassium, calcium or lime, and magnesium), percent of organic matter and lime requirements. With this information, a fertilizer and lime program can be determined based on the needs of the plants to be grown and the condition of the soil.

There is a fee at all MU Extension Centers for

a soil test to cover laboratory and handling costs. The total cost will vary from county to county.

Getting results back generally takes from one to two weeks. The months of January, February and March are normally peak months for soil tests.

## **COLLECTING SAMPLES**

When taking a soil sample from the lawn, garden or field, remember to use a clean spade and clean pail. Push the spade deep into soil and throw out a spade full of soil.

"Then cut a one-inch slice of soil from the back of the hole with the spade. Be sure the slice goes seven inches deep and is even in width and thickness. Place this slice in the pail," said Schnakenberg.

Repeat these steps five or six times at different spots over your lawn, garden or field.

"Thoroughly mix the six or seven slices you have in the pail. After mixing, take about one pint of soil to your nearest extension center," said Schnakenberg.

Each soil test done with the MU Extension office comes with recommendations made by a trained and experienced specialist. If you have questions about the results, there are MU Extension specialists who can answer questions about the soil test results free of charge.

"Without the information a soil test provides all you can do is guess. A guess will normally result in crop loss or poor blooming," said Schnakenberg. "To make it easy for you to interpret the soil test results, your report form will indicate which fertilizers, and how much, you should apply." Δ