

Soil Sampling...The Ins and Outs

Column on gardening in Montgomery County

By: Brad Thompson

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Well, it is almost Fall and if you're wanting to reseed your yard, plant some new shrubs or trees, or get your garden ready for next spring, now would be the time to collect soil samples. Soil sampling is an easy way to determine what your soil needs, to accommodate what you are planning on growing or already have growing. In order to take a soil sample, you need four items:

1. A clean plastic bucket to collect the soil
2. A clean shovel or soil probe
3. Soil boxes that your sample will go in
4. The soil sample form to fill out and send in with the soil samples.

When sampling, for every 1,000 square feet, 10 to 15 areas need to be sampled and placed within the bucket. Using a shovel or probe, you'll need to sample 4 to 6 inches of soil per area. Once you've got your 10 to 15 samples, mix the soil thoroughly in the bucket. Then remove 1 to 1.5 cups of soil out of bucket and place within the soil sample box. For each sample, you will need to designate a sample ID on the soil form and put that same sample ID on the soil sample box. Once you have taken all the samples you need, they can be taken to your local Cooperative Extension office which will send the samples to Raleigh for analysis. Results are usually seen within 3 to 5 weeks. So, I know what you're thinking; "Why should I take a soil sample?" Well, there are a couple of reasons. The first is plants,

much like people, need nutrients to grow properly and plants get most of their nutrients from the soil. If the pH and nutrient levels within the soil are not within certain levels for optimal plant growth for certain plants, then newly planted and established plants will not grow correctly. The second reason is that it is **FREE**, at least from April 1 through November 30! As citizens of North Carolina, we are fortunate that through Tobacco Trust money, this service is offered for free. Any soil samples received after November 30 are charged \$4 per sample. Therefore, please take advantage of this service for the sake of yourself and your plants. For more information on soil sampling and how to read the analysis, please RSVP to the Soil Sample Analysis workshop on October 10 at 6pm where Montgomery County Horticulture Agent Brad Thompson will go over how to take a soil sample and then talk about how to read the analysis when you receive it from Raleigh. RSVP by October 7 by calling the Montgomery County Extension office via phone at 910-576-6011. You can also visit our website at Montgomery.ces.ncsu.edu for other Cooperative Extension articles and events that will be taking place.