

Soil Testing- Fall or Spring?

As we enter the end of the growing season, this is a great time to be planning for next year. One way to improve next year's season is by testing your soil and amending accordingly. Soil analysis is the first step to a quality fertility program that will help you maximize your productivity in the fields. A standard test will provide information on soil pH, buffer pH (when needed), organic matter, available phosphorus, exchangeable potassium, magnesium, calcium, cation exchange capacity (CEC), percent base saturation of cation elements and fertility recommendations for up to three crops. You can include other testing for an additional fee that will measure micronutrients or other specifics not included in the standard test.

Soil fertility is important to the health of your crops. Plants have optimum nutrient levels needed for their growth. Soil tests will determine current fertility status and provide information to maintain optimum fertility. Too high of levels of nutrients is often worse than having too low of levels. Having soil fertility tested helps eliminate wasteful spending on fertilizer and amendments that the soil might not need. If you are noticing problems with your plants, soil tests can help lead to a diagnosis such as a nutrient deficiency or too high of a soil pH.

Soil nutrients and fertility fluctuate during the growing season. During a typical growing season, producers might add manure, fertilizer, lime, mulch, compost, etc. Nutrients are lost through leaching, plant growth and development, as well as the harvest of crops. There are benefits to sampling your soil in the fall and the spring. Fall after harvest or spring before planting are easy times to sample your soil. Fall sampling is preferred if lime applications are anticipated as it provides time to neutralize the soil's acidity before planting again.

Although weather patterns vary, fall soil sampling is often easier as soil is not as wet or frozen as it can be in the springtime. Spring testing labs often receive a high volume of soil tests which can take longer to get results back, delaying your ability to amend your soil before planting season. By soil testing in the fall, you can get the results back to either amend your soil before winter or have it ready to be amended first thing in the spring, resulting in amended soil by the time you are ready to plant.

The key to a quality soil analysis is the soil sampling and handling before it arrives to the laboratory. Collect samples using chrome plated or stainless-steel soil probes or augers. A clean spade or shovel can also be used. Soil should be sampled to root depth, around 8 inches. Collect a representative sample from area that will be utilized. This means going in a zigzag or "M" shaped pattern to collect 10-15 core samples that will be mixed to create a composite sample to be analyzed. Use clean, plastic buckets to collect and mix your core samples. Be sure to remove any debris from your soil. A sample should be ½ to a pint in size. Break up lumps and air dry the soil if needed prior to shipping. Samples can be sent in sample bags through a laboratory or in Ziplock bags. Be sure to label samples if you are collecting more than one sample to be tested. Samples should be mailed in as soon as possible once collected. Each laboratory has a different form to be filled out with the sample. Most extension offices in the area use Spectrum Analytic Inc. for soil sampling.

The sample can be brought into the extension office and mailed for you. The extension office will mail in your samples to Spectrum Analytical Inc. Agronomic crops cost \$14 for the basic soil analysis and turf/ornamental tests are \$15 for the basic analysis. This cost covers the sample analysis and mailing

costs. Turn around is anywhere from 1 to 2 weeks after the laboratory receives the sample. If you need any help with soil sampling, feel free to contact the local extension office at 937-544-2339.

Upcoming Events

The Agribusiness Field Night that was originally scheduled for October 5th has been rescheduled to October 24th. The time is still from 5:30 to 8:00pm. This is a local event where you can learn more about what the students at the Ohio Valley Career & Technical Center Agribusiness and School Farm do. You can tour the farm to learn about marketing and sustainable management. Register for this free event at go.osu.edu/ovctc or call Bridget at 614-247-9757.

Certified Crop Advisor CEU Credits Available

Columbus – The Ohio State University Extension Agronomic Crops Team has developed an online, self-paced course for Certified Crop Advisors to earn CEU credits. The course is designed as a series of eight video, each with a five-question quiz. Up to four CEU credits can be earned upon successful completion of all eight modules and quizzes with a passing score. The course is open from October 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024 with a cost of \$45.00. CCAs can access the course by going to go.osu.edu/ccapd