Don’t Guess, Soil Test!

How did your garden do this year? Was your tomato yield down? Did your green beans do as well as you wanted? Maybe it’s time to do a soil test!

According to OSUE Fact Sheet HYG-1132 (located at Ohioline.osu.edu), Soil testing is an excellent investment for garden, lawn, landscape plants, and commercial crops. It is a very inexpensive way of maintaining good plant health and maximum crop productivity. The standard soil test provides the status of phosphorus (P), potassium (K), calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), pH, cation exchange capacity, lime requirement index, and base saturations. Additional tests are also available for iron (Fe), zinc (Zn), manganese (Mn), soluble salts, nitrates, and organic matter content. With a representative soil sample and an accurate test, sound fertilizer recommendations can help gardeners and growers improve plant quality and productivity, and save money, too!

The soil test takes the guesswork out of fertilization and is extremely cost effective. It not only eliminates the waste of money spent on unnecessary fertilizers, but also eliminates over-usage of fertilizers, hence helping to protect the environment.

Soil samples can be taken in the spring or fall for established sites. For new sites, soil samples can be taken anytime when the soil is workable. Most people conduct their soil tests in the spring. However, autumn can also be a great time to take soil tests if one wants to avoid the spring rush and suspects a soil pH problem. Fall soil testing will allow you ample time to apply lime to raise the soil pH. Sulfur should be applied in the spring if the soil pH needs to be lowered.

A soil tests every two to three years is usually adequate. Sample more frequently if you desire a closer monitoring of the fertility levels, or if you grow plants that are known to be heavy feeders.

A soil sample is best taken with a soil probe or an auger. However, a spade, knife, or trowel can also be used to take thin slices or sections of soil. Soils should be collected in a clean plastic pail or box.

Gardeners, homeowners, landscapers, growers, farmers, and all other interested parties should contact their local OSU Extension office to find out the scope of services in each county, if they have questions about soil testing. See http://extension.osu.edu/counties.php for a list of OSU Extension offices, their contact information, and services that each office offers.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions the protocol to submit a soil sample has changed. Please call ahead so that the form can be filled out with your name, address, phone number and type of sample (Field or Lawn/Garden). You can drop off your soil sample at the office, but you need to call ahead before coming to give an approximate time you will be arriving at the OSUE office in Georgetown. The phone number is 937-378-6716. The cost is $12.00 for a field sample (per sample) and $15.00 for a Lawn/Garden sample (per sample). Soil can be in a zipped lock baggie, 10 to 12 ounces and should be as dry as possible. Payment can be made by cash or check at the time of drop off.

Dreaming about your garden? Ordering seeds? It’s time to think about the health of your soil!