

# Soil Testing for the Homeowner

**Take the guesswork out of liming and fertilizing your landscape. Read on to learn how to take a good soil sample.**

## Getting a Representative Soil Sample

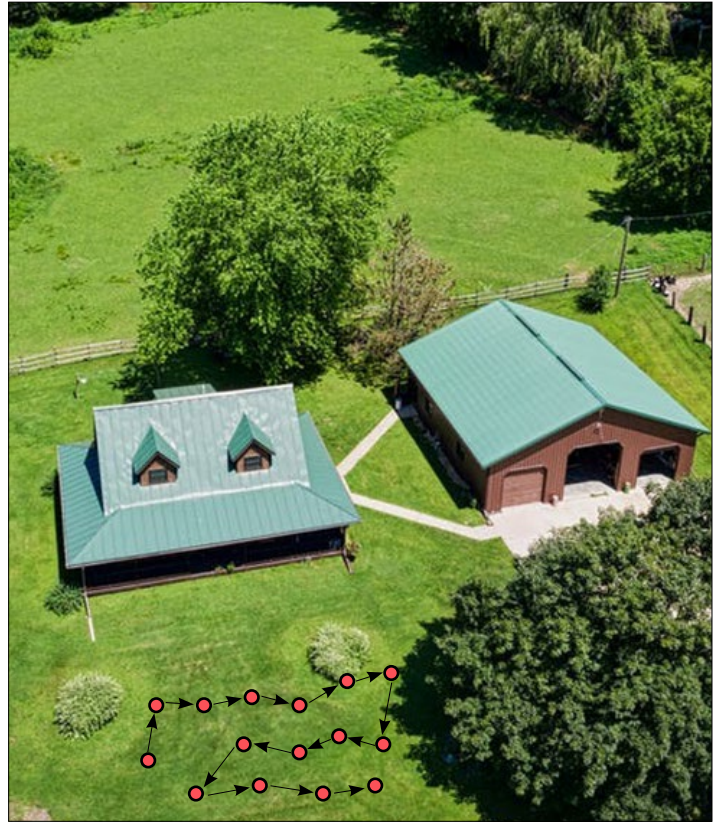
Soil is highly variable. Hydrangea flowers, like the one pictured here, illustrate how small distances translate to big soil differences. Hydrangea flower color is impacted by soil pH. Acidic soil conditions favor blue flowers, and basic soils contribute to pink flowers. This plant has both blue and pink flowers, indicating a measurable jump in soil pH just in the root zone of one plant. This highlights just how important it is to sample from several locations in the designated area. One scoop of soil does not accurately represent your entire yard.



**Define the area to be tested:** In the picture above, the homeowner divides the property into three different areas. Each area requires its own soil sample container.



**Gather the supplies you need: soil probe, spade or shovel, plastic bucket, and sample containers. Containers are available at your local Extension office.**



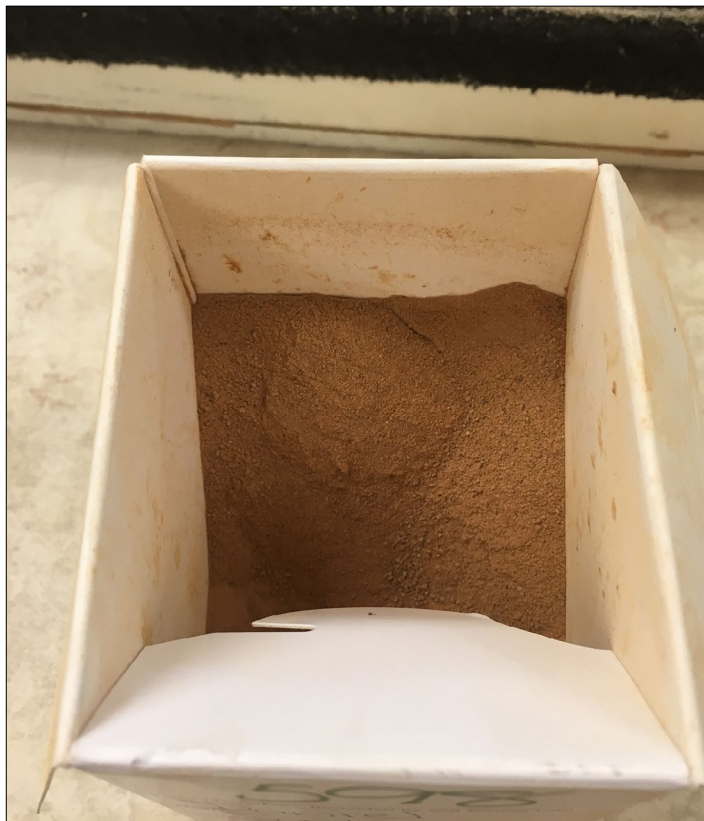
**Collect 15 to 20 different soil plugs from different places in the defined area. Remove vegetation/turf from the ground surface before collecting plugs.**



**Take soil from the top 4 to 6 inches and place in a plastic bucket.**



**Mix all plugs from a designated area together in a plastic bucket.**



Fill a soil collection container with soil from the bucket. Fill it to the fill line and close the container.

 A white soil collection container with a label form on the front. The form has several horizontal lines for text entry. The labels are: "Lab Number (provided by Soil Testing Lab)", "Name", "Address", "Email/Phone", "Front yard" (with an arrow pointing to the line), and "Field Name or Number".

In addition to the other information on the container, remember to write the sample name (and your name, if desired) on the outside of the container. Clearly write your order number and sample name on each container. Note: This information must match what you enter online.

 A white soil collection container with a label form on the front. The form has several horizontal lines for text entry. The labels are: "Lab Number (provided by Soil Testing Lab)", "Name", "Address", "Email/Phone", "Front yard" (with an arrow pointing to the line), and "Field Name or Number".


 A white soil collection container with a label form on the front. The form has several horizontal lines for text entry. The labels are: "Lab Number (provided by Soil Testing Lab)", "Name", "Address", "Email/Phone", "Back yard" (with an arrow pointing to the line), and "Field Name or Number".


 A white soil collection container with a label form on the front. The form has several horizontal lines for text entry. The labels are: "Lab Number (provided by Soil Testing Lab)", "Name", "Address", "Email/Phone", "Garden" (with an arrow pointing to the line), and "Field Name or Number".

If you have multiple areas that need sampling, repeat the entire collection process.

## Order Online and Ship or Drop Off Locally

Instead of paper forms, all soil samples are registered through an Extension account at <https://soiltesting.extension.msstate.edu/order>. The steps to complete this process are on our website: <https://extension.msstate.edu/agriculture/soils/soil-testing>.

After registering your soil sample, ship or drop off locally to:

**Southern Soil & Plant Lab, LLC.**  
**117 Haley Barbour Parkway**  
**Yazoo City, MS 39194**

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