

Bluestem Breezes
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Soil Testing – A Tool for Everyone

Every couple of years I take this soil testing column, rework it, and present it to you....again. Why? Because it's important. I promise!

If you don't have this column memorized, please read on.

If you haven't tested your fields, your garden, and your lawn, please read on.

If you haven't soil tested in the past three years, please read on.

I knew it, you're still with me. Here is what I tell everyone when I'm trying to convince them to soil test: it's a cheap insurance policy! Why spend extra dollars and send nutrients "down the river", when it's unnecessary?

Soil test recommendations are a tool used for applying appropriate nutrients to your soil to boost the fertility, or productivity. Soil testing is a simple, cheap way to determine the level of nutrients in your soil. Soil test results indicate whether you should or should not fertilize your soil. As well, they indicate how much of what you should apply.

For example, many rural gardeners believe in the power of manure as a fertilizer. That's great, until the nutrient levels are sky rocketing and your plants are no longer bearing fruit. For \$5 to \$11 (depending on the test selected), you may save money by not adding potassium or phosphorus to your garden. The soil test may instruct you also to add sulfur to decrease pH or give recommendations on the amount of nitrogen to add.

Soil tests are unique to your soil.

If contemplating whether to grow corn or soybeans this year, the soil test can give you fertilizer recommendations for each crop. As a gardener, you may receive recommendations for each type of produce you intend to grow.

Fertilizer can be expensive. Farmers and gardeners may save money in the long run by completing a soil test now. The results will help guide your decision making process, in regards to fertilizer, before you write a hefty check that may not be necessary.

While soil tests may not be necessary every year, it is recommended to conduct them about every 3 years on average. These results can be compared over the years to watch trends in your soils' nutrient levels, too.

Soil probes are the best, most accurate way to pull samples for your upcoming soil test. Probes may be checked out from the Extension Office any time. We can also give you simple instructions for accurate sampling methods.

Regardless of whether you farm thousands of acres or plant a garden with a handful of plants, a soil test is a helpful resource tool. Plus, it is EASY to conduct! I encourage you to give it a try THIS month.

For additional information soil testing information, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.