Soil Sampling and Testing: Now is THE Best Time

Attractive lawns and gardens add to the aesthetics and value of the home. To have a lush lawn and productive garden, it is generally necessary to add fertilizer on a periodic basis. When lawns and gardens do not receive needed nutrients, they rarely achieve the quality or productivity anticipated. Alternatively, when excess fertilizer is applied, nutrients are wasted causing costs to go up unnecessarily and posing a potential threat to the environment.

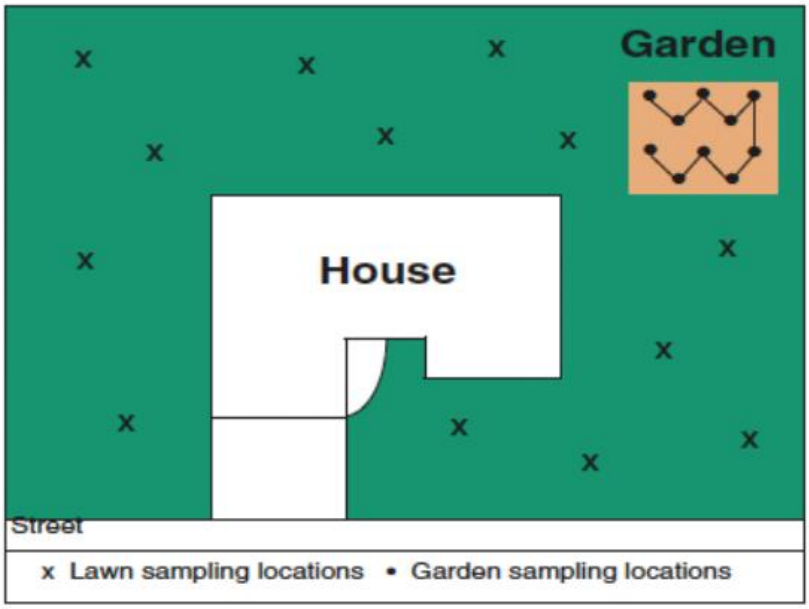
All plants, including turf grass and garden plants, require 16 essential nutrients to thrive and grow as well as favorable soil chemical conditions as indicated by the soil pH. So, for a lawn or garden to maintain quality and productivity, fertilizer may need to be applied to supply extra nutrients that could be in deficient amounts in the soil. In addition, sulfur or lime may need to be added to adjust the soil's pH. A basic soil test will identify both nutrient deficiency as well as any pH adjustments that may need to be made.

SAMPLING

Following proper soil sampling techniques will ensure you receive accurate results. Soil samples may be taken any time of the year. But, avoid sampling within two months after applying any additives such as a pH conditioner, fertilizer, compost, or manure as it will produce a false reading.

Use separate samples for lawns and gardens to ensure a representative area has been sampled. Be sure the ground is not wet and scrape plant debris from soil surface before sampling. Take samples at a 6" depth. Using a clean bucket and a soil probe or spade, combine cores or slices of soil from at least 15 locations scattered throughout the lawn or garden. Mix soil thoroughly and fill a Ziploc bag with about a pint of the mixture.

Take your soil sample(s) to your local county extension office. They will ensure your sample gets bagged properly, sent off to the OSU horticultural department for lab testing, and then provide you nutrient recommendations based on the soil test.



TESTING

A soil test is a chemical analysis that estimates a soil's ability to supply nutrients. The essential benefit is to ensure that only needed nutrients are added and in quantities which don't adversely affect environmental quality. Without such a test, you may be "flying blind" in terms of knowing if you have the correct pH and proper nutrients in the soil.

The soil test report will make recommendations for you to prepare for the next growing season. Therefore, it is advisable to test your soil months in advance. For a cool-season lawn, submit samples during the spring; for a warm-season lawn, vegetable garden, or flowerbed, submit samples in the fall or winter.

The basic test that analyzes for levels of nitrogen, phosphate, potassium, as well as pH. Cost is $10 per sample and generally takes about 2-3 weeks to receive results. Test results and written recommendations will be mailed to you.

References:

Tulsa Master Gardeners Website: Soil Sampling & Testing Instructions

A Gardner's Guide to Soil Testing