

Sampling Instructions - 2024 Soil Testing Program

It's smart, free & easy!

Purpose & Overview

The Soil Testing Program is provided as a community service to advise residents about their soil's fertility and corresponding fertilizer considerations. It involves drawing soil samples from one's lawn &/or garden and having those samples delivered to the Soil Test Lab at the CT Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) in New Haven. Following evaluation, and within 1-2 weeks, the Soil Test Lab will then mail a written report back to each participant with results and fertilizing recommendations specific to their soil's composition and condition. Over the course of the past 15 years, over 1,150 local residents have benefitted as have our lakes, streams and lands.

This year's Soil Testing format has been modified slightly to ensure covid-safe participation by limiting personal interactions and avoiding one of two trips to a Sampling Site. Participants are being asked to download and print these Sampling Instructions, and to provide their own plastic 'sandwich bags' to hold their soil samples -- otherwise procedures are essentially the same as in prior years. This annual event is designed to help ensure smart fertilizing practices while avoiding over- or unnecessary fertilizing. It's free -- associated costs are being absorbed by our garden center sponsors -- and easy to participate. Donations are welcome to support this and similar Candlewood-focused environmental initiatives.

This event is intended to raise awareness of the importance of testing one's soil *before* fertilizing to ensure that fertilizer and other soil amendments are properly selected and applied. The net result will be healthier lawns and gardens and, importantly, a healthier Lake and Watershed environment. Reduced time, effort and fertilizer expenses can likewise be expected.

Action Steps

Participants need only to print out and follow these Instructions:

1. Assemble needed materials -- a garden trowel and small pail to scoop and mix soil samples, a zip-lock, quart-size plastic bag or similar for each area to be sampled, and several rubber bands to secure the bag(s) with the Transmittal Form (found at the bottom of reverse side)
2. Scoop and mix soil samples as instructed and pour into the receiving bag(s)
3. Complete the Transmittal Form, label the bags, and secure the package as described below
4. Deliver the soil samples Saturday morning, 4/20, to a designated Sample Drop-Off Site for subsequent transport to the Soil Test Lab
5. Sit back, await mailed results, then purchase and apply suggested fertilizer and enjoy the results.

Sampling Instructions

Use one or more zip-lock or similar plastic bags to securely contain your soil samples. The number of bags needed depends on the uniformity of your soil and whether you want both your lawn and garden analyzed. For each area to be tested, draw a separate, representative sample by removing narrow slices or 'cores' of soil using a garden trowel or similar tool:

- **For *uniform lawns*** – of ~½ acre of grass, draw ~10 cores; of ~1 acre, draw ~15 cores; lawn cores should be drawn from the upper 4" of soil -- then remove any grass, thatch, or roots
- **For *uniform gardens*** – that are small/typical, draw ~6 cores; for larger gardens, draw ~10 cores; garden cores should be drawn from the upper 6" of soil
- **For *lawn or garden areas that are not uniform***, separate representative cores should be drawn and mixed together for each area

- **For unusual or difficult conditions**, problem areas, or special testing requirements, contact the Test Lab before drawing samples (see contact info below; note the Lab is not open on weekends).

For each separate area being sampled, thoroughly mix the soil cores together in a bucket; then pour this mixture into a plastic bag until ~½ full. Do likewise with cores from second area using a separate bag, etc. Ideally these soil samples should be dry; if necessary, moist samples will be accepted. Label each baggie with your last name, sample #, and sampling area description for ease in interpreting results (e.g., *Smith - #1 - Front Lawn*). Use a Sharpie pen to label each sample in space designated or elsewhere on baggie; if a permanent marker is unavailable, one can be borrowed when samples are dropped off.

Packaging and Hand-Off Instructions

Complete the Soil Transmittal Form below, fold these Instructions in half (with the Transmittal Form facing outwards) and wrap around the bags containing the soil samples, securing with rubber bands. Deliver the resulting package to a Soil Sampling Site for hand-off between 8 AM and noon on Saturday, 4/20: in New Fairfield by Veterans Park/Old Rte 37; in Sherman as approach Sherman Green’s back lot; and in New Milford in the parking area of Scott’s Nursery and Landscaping, 322 Kent Road (Rte 7).

Soil Test Results

Test results are typically mailed back within 1-2 weeks. Soil samples are tested for texture (sand, loam, clay composition, etc.), organic matter, and nutrients (including pH, nitrate nitrogen, ammonium nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and if requested, salts). Based on test results, applications of limestone, fertilizer, and compost or manure may be suggested. The proper time and rates of application for each amendment are typically stated. When requested, organic amendments may also be suggested. The resulting report should aid in gauging fertilizer applications and in correcting deficiencies or, importantly, excesses. The CAES website contains additional information on interpreting results.

Soil Sample Transmittal Form

(Please print legibly; attach additional sheet if necessary)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Sample #	Sampling Area Description	Items Grown	Comments
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____

Test Lab Contact Information

Contact Gregory Bugbee at the Slate Laboratory, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station by:

Phone - 203/974-8521; **Fax** – 203/974-8502; **Email** – gregory.bugbee@ct.gov

Physical and Mailing address – CAES – Slate Laboratory, Soil Testing, 123 Huntington Street, New Haven, CT 06511

CAES website reference – www.ct.gov/caes

- *Sponsored by the Candlewood Watershed Initiative, Candlewood Lake Authority, Candlewood Voices, & Friends of Ball Pond in conjunction with the CT Agricultural Experiment Station -*