Sampling Instructions - 2021 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 for analysis. Following evaluation, and within 1-2 weeks, the Soil Test Lab will then send a written report back to each participant with results and fertilizing recommendations specific to their soil's composition and condition. Over the course of a dozen years 1,050+ 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 human 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 baggies 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 sponsors -- and easy to participate. Donations are welcome.

This event is intended to raise awareness of the importance of testing one's soil *before* fertilizing -- to ensure that it is necessary and appropriate to conditions, provides the correct nutrient mix, and is properly 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 plastic baggie or similar for each area to be sampled, and several rubber bands to secure the baggies with the Transmittal Form (on bottom of second page)
2. Scoop and mix dry soil samples as instructed and pour into the receiving baggies
3. Complete the Transmittal Form, label the baggies, and secure package as described below
4. Deliver the soil samples Saturday morning, 4/17, to a designated Sampling Site for handoff, and subsequent transport to the Soil Test Lab
5. Sit back, await mailed results, purchase and apply suggested fertilizer and enjoy the results.

Sampling Instructions

Use one or more zip-lock or similar plastic baggies to securely contain your soil samples. The number of baggies 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*** in their nutrient content, separate representative cores should be drawn from each different 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 baggie until ~½ full. Do likewise with cores from second area using a separate baggie, 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 to label sample in space designated or elsewhere on baggie; if a Sharpie or similar permanent-ink marker is not handy, one can be borrowed when samples are dropped off.

Packaging and Handoff Instructions

Complete the Soil Transmittal Form below, fold these Instructions in ½ (with the Transmittal Form facing outwards) and wrap around the baggies containing the soil samples, securing with rubber bands. Deliver the resulting package to a Sampling Site for handoff either in the parking lot behind New Fairfield Town Hall or in the back parking area of Sherman Green between 9:00 AM and noon on Saturday, 4/17.

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 salts). Based on test results, applications of limestone, fertilizer, and compost or manure are often suggested. The proper time and rates of application for each nutrient amendment are typically stated. When requested, organic amendments can also be suggested. The resulting report should aid in gauging fertilizer applications and in correcting deficiencies or excesses. The CAES website contains additional information on interpreting results.

Soil Sample Transmittal Form

(*Please print legibly; attach additional sheet if required*)

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

Mailing address – CAES – Slate Laboratory, Soil Testing, PO Box 1106, New Haven, CT 06504

Physical address (USPS, Fed Ex, etc.) – [as above], 123 Huntington St, 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* -