

General Q&As - 2024 Soil Testing Program

Saturday, April 20

What is the Soil Testing Program?

- It is one of a series of environmental initiatives in this case focused on an annual event termed ‘Soil Testing Day’ to assist property owners in making smart and environmentally sensitive decisions; held before the Spring planting/fertilizing season, it is offered as a community service and is free to all participants with our garden center sponsors defraying related expenses
- The event is designed to help residents understand the composition and fertility of their soils and suggest ways to enhance soil and plant health – importantly while protecting our Watershed environment and waters within
- It involves drawing and then testing soil samples from one’s lawn/garden at the Soil Test Lab of the CT Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) in New Haven
- It is one among several efforts being mounted to engage residents with our environment and build a positive ethic to benefit the quality of the Watershed and its allied waters

Why have a Soil Testing Day?

- To raise awareness of the value of testing one’s soil before planting or fertilizing
- To make the soil testing procedures and process less cumbersome for residents
- To demonstrate the merits of testing and answer basic questions on lawn/garden fertilization
- To help prevent unnecessary fertilizing, over-fertilizing, or inappropriate fertilizing
- To generate interest in ‘everyday-type’ voluntary actions to help protect our environment

Why should property owners test their soil?

- To determine if one’s lawn or garden requires fertilization
- To understand their soil’s current fertility and composition
- To receive expert advice on appropriate fertilization measures (whether to, what type, what combination of nutrients, how much to apply, and when)
- To ensure appropriate fertilization and help avoid introducing environmental risks
- To ultimately have a healthier environment while maintaining attractive lawns & gardens

What are the benefits of participating?

- It’s easy – sampling instructions are provided and packaged samples are delivered for you
- It’s informative – learn about your soil’s composition and fertility needs
- It’s valuable – helps guide original planting and ongoing maintenance actions
- It’s typically free and eliminates the cost and hassle of mailing samples to the Test Lab
- It could save resident time and effort – findings may indicate fertilization is not needed
- It could save money - by avoiding the expense of unnecessary/inappropriate fertilization
- It helps the Watershed and our water bodies by promoting smart, thoughtful applications

What’s involved?

- Those interested need to only download, print and follow the adjoining Sampling Instructions before 4/20; Instructions detail how to draw soil samples and package them for delivery to one of three Soil Sample Drop-Off Sites on Saturday morning, 4/20, between 8 AM and noon: the New Fairfield Site is located by Veterans Park/Old Rte 37; Sherman’s Site is in Sherman Green as approach the rear parking area; residents on the Lake’s eastern flank may find the parking area of Scott’s Nursery & Landscaping at 322 Kent Road (Rte 7) in New Milford the most convenient –

Just look for the balloons, traffic cones, and a volunteer awaiting hand-off while you remain in your car and can then drive away; your samples will be delivered directly to the Soil Test Lab where they will be analyzed and a report of recommendations generated and mailed to you

There are basically five simple steps involved:

1. Assemble needed materials -- a garden trowel and small pail to scoop and mix soil samples, a zip-lock plastic bag or similar for each area to be sampled, and several rubber bands to secure the bag(s) with the Transmittal Form provided on the second page of the Instructions
2. Scoop and mix soil samples as instructed and pour into the receiving bag(s)
3. Complete the Transmittal Form, label the bag(s), and secure the package per the Instructions
4. Deliver the soil samples Saturday morning, 4/20, to a designated Site for hand-off
5. Sit back, await mailed results, then purchase and apply suggested fertilizer and enjoy the results

How do I participate, get fertilizing suggestions, and receive answers to questions?

- Simply retrieve the Sampling Instructions from the CLA website which describes how to draw soil samples and package them for handoff
- If you have questions on soil fertility or testing, check out the web site cited below; for further answers, contact Greg Bugbee at CAES in New Haven @ 203/974-8521 (best time to call in Spring is on weekdays between 8:30 and 9 AM) or by email at gregory.bugbee@ct.gov

If I can't participate on Soil Testing Day, is there another way to have my soil tested?

- Simply access the Ag Station's web site at www.ct.gov/caes/cwp/view.asp?a=2836&q=378202 for instructions on how to draw your soil sample and where to send it for analysis
- It is recommended that one's soil be tested every 3-5 years, barring unusual circumstances

What if I plan to fertilize before the test results are available?

- We realize some property owners may want to fertilize before the arrival of test results (estimated at 1-2 weeks from Soil Testing Day at the outside)
- If it's inconvenient to defer application, we suggest you still participate so you will have your test results in hand well before Fall and can make the right fertilizing decisions in advance

Who is sponsoring Soil Testing Day?

- The Candlewood Watershed Initiative has taken the lead in launching Soil Testing Day; CWI is a grassroots volunteer team focused on protecting the quality of Candlewood Lake and its Watershed
- CWI is partnering with the Candlewood Lake Authority (CLA), Candlewood Voices, Friends of Ball Pond, and the CT Agricultural Experiment Station, which provides soil testing and fertilizing guidance
- Three local garden centers – Dom's Garden Center in Danbury, Meadowbrook Gardens, and Scott's Nursery & Landscaping, both of New Milford – are sponsoring this year's event and are offering special discounts on fertilizers for participants; please make a point of patronizing them and extend your thanks for their essential support on behalf of our vulnerable Lake and Watershed.