



Montmorency Conservation District
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SOIL TESTING – The first step to successful growing

All plants need water, food, and sunshine in varying degrees to grow successfully. Determining the amount of sunshine and water received by a particular site is easy; knowing what nutrients are available to the plants is more complicated since they cannot be seen or felt in the soil. Therefore, a sample of the soil should be sent to a laboratory for testing.

When a soil sample is sent to a laboratory, the sample submittal form asks questions regarding previous crops and intended crops because this makes a difference in the type and amount of fertilizer required. The test results report what is currently in the soil and what must be added for optimal crop growth. Over fertilizing means you spend more money than necessary; over fertilizing also means that the excess nutrients can leach into the groundwater and surrounding lakes and streams and cause problems. Under fertilizing means you will not achieve your desired results.

Taking a good soil sample is crucial to get the most accurate measurement of nutrients available to you. It is recommended that you take a soil sample at planting depth, as this is where the majority of the nutrients are placed mechanically. A good time to take a sample for testing is in the fall after the growing season is complete. Sampling and testing in the fall is beneficial because you will get the results back in time to formulate the fertilizer plan for the upcoming growing season. However, sampling and testing can be done in spring as well.

Mixing soil from several locations on each field or plot to create an "average" (or "composite") sample is recommended. Collect the random (10-20 per acre) samples in a five-gallon bucket, mix thoroughly, place approximately one cup of the mix in a bag, label each bag by field/plot, and drop it off at the Conservation District office. Test costs vary from \$12 to \$25. Results are usually obtained in a week to 10 days.

Whether you are looking at a food plot, garden, or farm field, soil sampling is the first step to assure that you get a “bumper” crop. For more information about soil testing, contact the Montmorency Conservation District at (989) 785-4083.