



Soil Learning Library



How to Take a Soil Sample for MMGA pH Testing

Planning to visit one of our free Soil pH Testing events? Taking a soil sample is easy!

- (1) **Identify the area(s) of your property you want to have tested.** Different areas may have different pH levels, e.g., lawn vs. flower bed vs. vegetable garden. To submit different areas for testing, collect separate samples. Within a given area, if there are sections that are sickly vs. healthy, they should be sampled and labeled separately (e.g., “sickly section of front lawn,” “healthy section of front lawn”).
- (2) **Gather your materials:**
 - A spade, shovel, soil probe, or augur for digging your sample(s)
 - One small clean bucket for each area you plan to sample (e.g., one bucket for the lawn, a separate bucket for your flower bed)
 - One small plastic bag for each area to be sampled
- (3) **Prepare your soil sample(s) – NOTE:** You will need to repeat this process for each of the areas you’ve decided to test.
 - **Step A:** Depending on how large the area is, dig between 5 and 10 holes. The depth of the holes should be based on the following guidelines:
 - Lawns: 4-6” deep
 - Garden beds: approx. 6-8”
 - Tree/shrub areas: 8-10” deep
 - **Step B:** Collect a soil sample all the way down to the bottom of each hole. In other words, make certain your sample includes soil from the top, the middle, and the bottom of each hole.
 - **Step C:** Combine all soil samples from the same area in a clean bucket. Mix thoroughly and remove stones, sticks, and other debris.
 - **Step D:** Set the bucket aside and let the soil dry for a few days.
 - **Step E:** Put approx. 1/2 cup of dry soil into a plastic bag. Mark the bag with your name and the area of your property where the sample was taken (e.g., Jane Jones, front lawn; Bob Brown, rhododendron bed).

To prepare samples for other areas of your property, repeat Steps A thru E above.

- (4) **Bring your sample(s) to the MMGA Soil pH Testing table at one of our free events.** (Visit our web page for the current schedule of events, <https://www.massmastergardeners.org/educational-resources/soil-testing>.)

***NOTE:** If you prefer to have your soil tested by a professional laboratory or other resource, we encourage you to follow the sampling process they recommend. Different testing techniques may have different sampling requirements.*

Have gardening questions? In partnership with two of Massachusetts’s most respected horticultural organizations, trained Master Gardeners staff two free Helplines. Your email should include as much information about your question as possible. If you have a photo, please attach it. Please also include your name and phone number so that we can follow up with you.

- **Massachusetts Horticultural Society** Horticulture Helpline: Email your question to MHSHelpline@MassMasterGardeners.org.
- **New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill** Horticultural Help Line: Email your question to Hortline@NEBG.org.

Visit our website at <https://www.massmastergardeners.org/home>