



MISSISSIPPI STATE  
UNIVERSITY™

EXTENSION

# Soil Testing for the Homeowner

*Take the guesswork out of liming and fertilizing your landscape. Read on to learn how to take a good soil sample.*

## Getting a Representative Soil Sample

Soil is highly variable. Hydrangea flowers, like the one pictured here, illustrate how small distances translate to big soil differences. Hydrangea flower color is impacted by soil pH. Acidic soil conditions favor blue flowers, and basic soils contribute to pink flowers. This plant has both blue and pink flowers, indicating a measurable jump in soil pH just in the root zone of one plant. This highlights just how important it is to sample from several locations in the designated area. One scoop of soil does not accurately represent your entire yard.



Define the area to be tested: In the picture above, the homeowner divides the property into three different areas. Each area requires its own soil sample box.





Gather the supplies you need: soil probe, spade or shovel, plastic bucket, and sample boxes. Boxes are available at your local Extension office (or use quart-sized zip-top bags).



Collect 15 to 20 different soil plugs from different places in the defined area. Remove vegetation/turf from the ground surface before collecting plugs.



Take soil from the top 4 to 6 inches and place in a plastic bucket.

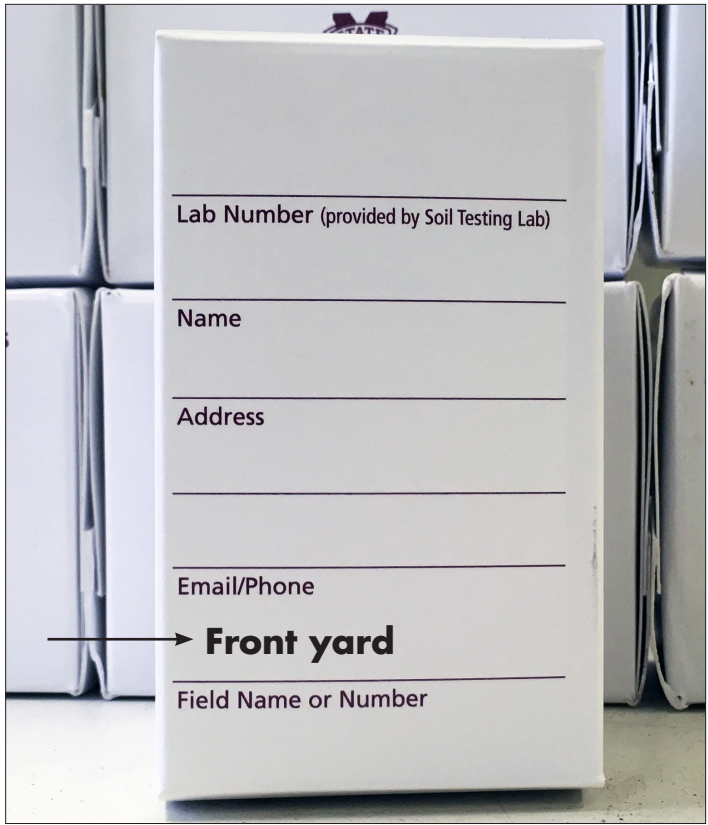


Mix all plugs from a designated area together in a plastic bucket.

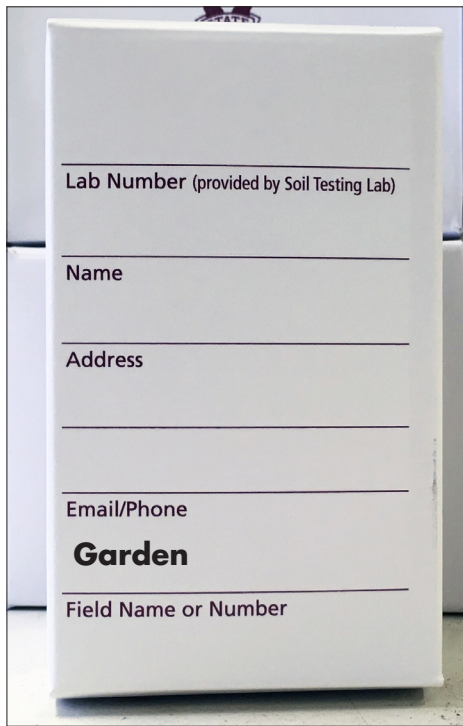
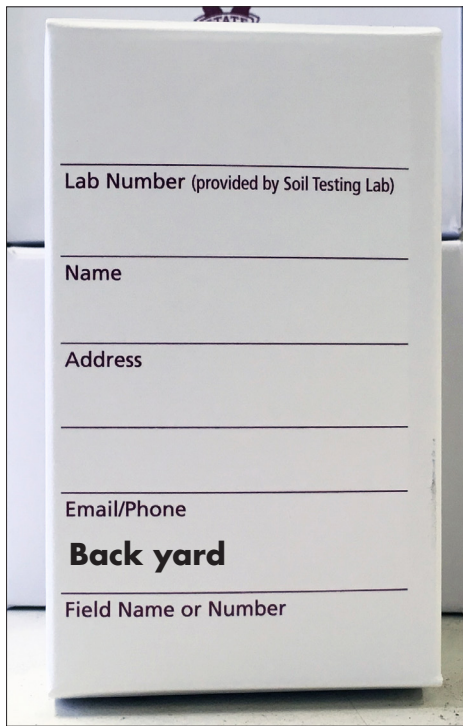
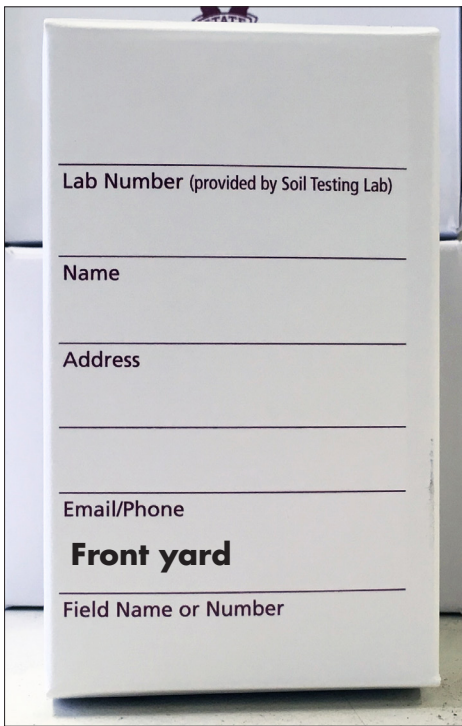




Fill a soil sample box (or zip-top bag) with soil from the bucket.



In addition to the other information on the box, remember to label the sample name.



If you have multiple areas that need sampling, repeat the entire collection process.

Instead of paper forms, all soil samples are registered through an Extension account. The steps to complete this process are on our website: <http://extension.msstate.edu/content/submitting-soil-test-the-lab>.

After registering your soil sample, take the soil sample(s) to your local Extension office or mail them directly to the this address:

**MSU Soil Testing Lab  
P.O. Box 9610  
Mississippi State, MS 39762**



The information given here is for educational purposes only. References to commercial products, trade names, or suppliers are made with the understanding that no endorsement is implied and that no discrimination against other products or suppliers is intended.

**Publication 3883** (POD-4-23)

Revised by **Keri Jones**, PhD, Laboratory Coordinator, Soil Testing Lab, from a previous edition by Keith Crouse, PhD, retired Associate Extension Professor.

*Copyright 2023 by Mississippi State University. All rights reserved. This publication may be copied and distributed without alteration for nonprofit educational purposes provided that credit is given to the Mississippi State University Extension Service.*

Produced by Agricultural Communications.

*Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. Discrimination in university employment, programs, or activities based on race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other status protected by applicable law is prohibited.*

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. STEVE MARTIN, Director