



TEST, DON'T GUESS: SOIL TEST FOR FOOD PLOT SUCCESS

Soil is the foundation of a healthy food plot, so it's essential that you know what condition your foundation is in before planting. More than likely, the land you're turning into a food plot was once used for other purposes.

Soil that is deficient in the proper nutrients, or out of pH balance, cannot produce forage that has high nutritional value. The only reliable way to know what the soil needs, and doesn't need, is to test, don't guess.

Soil Test Timing

The best time to soil test is in the fall and early spring, before previous residue starts to breakdown. If fertilization has already taken place, you should wait at least 12 weeks before testing, in order to get an accurate reading.

Taking the Sample

- **Use clean tools.** Pesticide or fertilizer residues on the tools, or in the container, will create misleading results. It is recommended to use a plastic container, as metals from metal containers can attach to soil particles and skew results.
- **Take multiple samples** of six to eight cores from each food plot where the soil type and topography are fairly uniform, and where the food plot has been uniformly managed, with regard to the crop grown or fertilizer applied
- **Limit the maximum area of each sample** to no more than 2 acres
- **Make a random zig-zag pattern over the entire field** when collecting the sample
- **Mix the cores thoroughly** in a plastic container and submit about a pint of soil to the lab (or provide to your local cooperative or store to be sent in)

Rule of Thumb: Soil test every two to three years. Take soil from the top 3 to 5 inches.

What to Look For

A soil test will provide important information for N-nitrogen, P-phosphorus and K-potassium. This test will also contain a lime recommendation, which will help determine if lime is needed to adjust the soil pH. **The ideal pH for most species of food plots is 6.5-7.0.** A pH scale reads 1-most acidic, 7-Neutral and 14-most alkaline.

