



# LEARN HOW TO TEST YOUR



## What is a soil test?

Soil tests identify the amounts of certain nutrients that are present in your soil, and are recommended every 1–3 years. Soil samples should be taken in the fall for the next year's garden or a couple months before planting the garden in early spring. It is best to sample when the soil is not saturated.

For most lawns and gardens, a basic soil test that includes nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, calcium, sodium, sulfate, organic matter, and pH will suffice. It may take up to 2 weeks to receive your results. Give us a call if you need help interpreting soil tests or determining rates of fertilizer application.

## Interested in learning more?

If you want to learn more about your soil, our booklet, *Know Your Soils: Creating Healthy Soil and Productive Gardens* is a great resource. It's an in-depth guide to understanding and caring for your soil. **Requesting a copy is easy: email us at [outreach@snohomishcd.org](mailto:outreach@snohomishcd.org) or check it out online at [www.snohomishcd.org/know-your-soil](http://www.snohomishcd.org/know-your-soil).**

## Snohomish Conservation District

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# Soil Testing: Taking Samples

1. Define your sample area(s). Remember each sample should be of similar use or conditions. Raised beds, lawns, and acid-loving plants (rhododendrons, blueberries) would require separate tests. In the example below, they are sampling (1) the large garden bed in front of their house and (2) the orchard area to the side of their house.
2. Gather your supplies. You will need a shovel or hand trowel, a clean plastic container, and sample bags, one for each sample area. New zip-top bags work as sample bags, too.
3. For each sample, collect at least 5 slices of soil from across the sample area in a random, but evenly distributed pattern. A zig-zag pattern works for larger sample areas.
4. Dig out a slice of soil with a shovel or trowel to a depth of 6".
5. Remove plant and root material, rocks, twigs, sod, and any debris from the soil. Place soil in a clean plastic bucket.
6. Move to the next spot and repeat steps 4–5 at least 5 times.
7. Once all of the slices have been collected, break up any clumps and mix the soil thoroughly. Remove any remaining plant and root material, rocks, twigs, sod, and debris from the sample.
8. Put a minimum of 2 cups of the mixed soil in the sample bag or zip-top bag. Label the bag with your name and five letters or numbers that will help you remember where the sample was taken.
9. Send samples to the lab immediately, as soil chemistry changes rapidly with time. If you are not mailing them that day, place the sealed samples in a refrigerator or freezer. If samples are over-saturated, put the soil on a newspaper and let air dry overnight.
10. Fill out the Soil Sample Information Sheet, include payment and mail samples to:  
**A&L Western Agricultural Laboratories, Inc., 10220 S.W. Nimbus Ave., Bldg. K-9, Portland, OR 97223.**

1. DEFINE SAMPLE AREA(S)	2. GATHER SUPPLIES	3. MAP OUT SAMPLE AREA	4. DIG OUT SOIL SLICE
			
5. REMOVE ROOTS & DEBRIS- PLACE IN BUCKET	6. REPEAT STEPS 4-5 UNTIL COMPLETE W/AREA	7. BREAK UP CLUMPS & MIX SOIL THOROUGHLY	8. PLACE A MINIMUM OF 2 CUPS OF SOIL IN BAG
			