

## Tip of the Week

### Get the scoop on your DIRT with a soil test



Landscape contractors and experienced gardeners know that the quality of blooms, veggies and overall plant health you get out of the ground is directly related to what you put in it. Everything that happens down in that dirt, along with the help of water and nutrients, is what makes plants grow--or not.

If you don't know what kind of soil you have in terms of residual strengths and deficiencies, your growing efforts may not produce the best results. Having low organic matter in the range of less than 1 percent is typical in Colorado; somewhere between 3-5 percent is ideal. Most soil needs amending, but the smart move is to learn about the baseline of the soil you have now before adding amendments willy nilly.

A soil test from a testing firm or from Colorado State University (in the \$28 range per sample) can give you important information about the PH of your soil, salt content, amount of organic matter already present and the content of several minerals. Lab personnel can then help you plan how

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best to amend the soil for maximum benefit.

### **Tips for collecting a soil sample**

- The sample needs to represent a uniform area, so if your entire yard is consistent you will only need to send one composite sample. But if one area is clearly clay and another is very sandy, test those areas separately.
- If you have an area where plants just won't grow, you may have a high salt content or another problem. Test this area separately.
- Collect samples with a soil probe like the one above or use a shovel or trowel that is clean and rust free. Rust will contaminate the sample with iron.
- Collect small amounts from several places within the selected area. Take soil from the surface to a depth of 8 to 12 inches. Make sure that debris like dead leaves and other plant matter has been scraped away first.
- Mix the collected samples together in a clean plastic pail. Note: galvanized or brass containers will contaminate the sample with zinc.
- Next, spread the soil to dry on top of clean plastic or butcher paper (no newspaper as it will contaminate also). Leaving wet/moist soil in an airtight container will create chemical changes in the soil that will affect the test results.
- Once dried, take about a pint of the mixture to be tested.

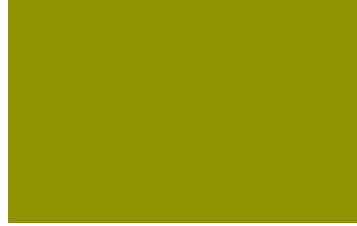
Especially when you are installing or renovating an entire landscape, having a soil test done prior to any planting is strategic. Plants are a big and long-term investment and getting them off to a good start in the right soil is just common sense.

**Need help with your soil or other**



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