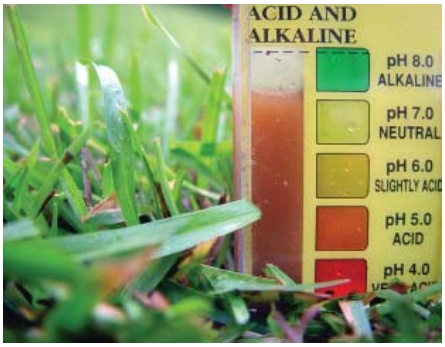
UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

Cooperative Extension

UNH Cooperative Extension Info Line Question of the Week

Soil Test Results



Q: I just received my soil-test results.
Can you help me interpret the report?

A: The top section of the report has information that identifies the soil sample and information you provided to us. The second section contains the results of the laboratory analysis. The third section covers the recommendations in two parts, a fertilizer recommendation and any additional comments.

The pH is a measure of soil acidity. Most cultivated plants grow best in soils with a soil pH between 6.2 and 6.8 (exceptions: blueberries, potatoes, azaleas and rhododendrons). Home gardeners usually apply agricultural limestone or hardwood ashes to raise the soil pH; the report's recommendation will indicate the application rate.

The test results for the minerals phosphorus, potassium, magnesium and calcium will show the amounts of these minerals available to plants, indicate the range (very high to low) or the reading, and show the optimum range of that mineral for its intended use. The test will also show the lead level of your soil and whether it's high enough to require remediation.

The supplements recommendation will show the amount of lime (to raise pH) or sulfur (to lower pH) required to adjust pH to optimum level for plant growth. The fertilizer recommendation (either standard" or "organic," which you requested on the form you submitted with your sample) shows the amount of actual nutrients to apply in lbs. per 1000 sq. ft. The recommendation may give an example of how the nutrients could be applied. Comments will pertain to information you provided us on the soil sample entry form such as whether one or more nutrients should increase or stay at maintenance levels, how and when the fertilizer will be applied.