

NEWS RELEASE

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Does Your Soil Pass the Test?

The Kansas Healthy Yards and Communities recommendation is to have your soil tested every 3 to 5 years or prior to a new planting. This soil test will identify the soil pH and nutrient levels to determine if turf, shrubs, flowers, food crops and trees have what they need to grow. It is better to test the soil than just guess what to add.

A routine soil test will cost \$6.50. Grants and most Extension offices reduce that cost. Riley County residents can get their first two tests done for \$2.15 each. This minor expense is likely to be recovered when selecting the proper fertilizer for your soils need.

Soils in the Riley County area do vary. Many of them have adequate fertility and the soil test would prove it. On these soils, fertilizing them is not necessary and if nutrients are added it is a waste. Too much and it can become toxic and a pollutant.

An elevated soil pH is the most common soil condition that shows up on Riley County garden soil test results. A soil pH of 6.5 is preferred by many plants. Our most common pH is 7.8. Growing plants that tolerate that pH is best. I like strawberries and that pH is too high for them. The addition of 2 pounds of sulfur worked into my 100 square feet of bed is required.

When you get motivated to soil test, bring a composite of your soil to the Extension office on the second floor of the Riley County Office Building. This composite of two cups is made up of several soil samplings taken to a depth of 6 inches. The more samplings taken the more concise the test will be. Put the soil in a disposable container. A plastic sandwich bag is ideal.

Phosphorus and potassium are major nutrients that are identified in the soil test. These nutrients are easiest added prior to planting. Our garden plants won't deplete these nutrients once built up in the soil. Nitrogen is not generally tested since it is mobile and will need added annually.

I encourage you to soil test and don't just guess what is in your soil. Your plants will thank you with good health. I will thank you for not using nutrients that aren't needed and potential pollutants.

You can find out more information on this and other horticulture topics by going to the Riley County, K-State Research and Extension website at www.riley.ksu.edu. Gregg may be contacted by calling 785-537-6350 or stopping by 110 Courthouse Plaza in Manhattan or e-mail: geyeston@ksu.edu.