King Conservation District

Local Food
Healthy Forests
Clean Water
Better Ground

Soil Nutrient Testing Program

Why Test Soil?

Whether growing forage for livestock, growing a vegetable garden, or maintaining an orchard or landscape, soil testing will help you to:

- Apply the correct amount of fertilizer for the plants you are growing.
- Prevent surface and groundwater from becoming contaminated by excess fertilizers.
- Ensure that soil nutrients and other conditions (such as soil pH) affecting plant growth are present in the right amounts.

Each resident in KCD's service area is eligible for up to five free soil tests, lifetime per address.

Additional tests: $35 each.

Test Your Soil

KCD provides soil testing for all landowners in our service area.* Up to five (5) free soil samples can be submitted lifetime for each address. Additional tests can be purchased for $35 each.

KCD encourages landowners to test soils regularly. We send your samples to a certified lab to test for the major nutrients N-P-K (nitrogen-potassium-phosphorus), micronutrients, pH, and organic matter. KCD staff will supply you with a packet which includes the results and information on interpreting the soil test report. Results are generally available within three weeks. We do not currently pay for heavy metals or other contaminants; please contact us for information about alternative tests.

* KCD's service area includes all cities and unincorporated areas in King County, except for the City of Enumclaw, the City of Federal Way, the City of Milton, the City of Pacific and the City of Skykomish.

See other side for instructions on how to take a soil sample and submit it to KCD.

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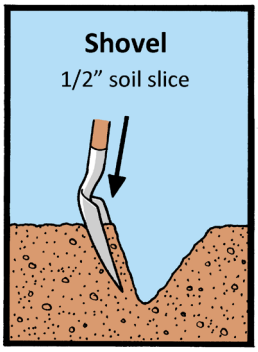
How to Take a Sample

Avoid sampling when soils are saturated (after heavy rain) or within a few weeks after applying lime, fertilizer, compost or aged manure. You will need:

- A shovel, hand trowel or a soil probe
- A clean plastic container, such as a bucket
- Sampling bags (gallon-size plastic zipper-style bags will work)



Take thin slices of soil approximately 1/2". It is easiest to take a slice if you first remove a v-shaped hole, as shown above.

1. Designate sample areas by what is growing there. For example, if you have a garden of mixed vegetables, that could be one sample area. If you have a pasture and a garden, take separate samples of each. If an area has varied characteristics, such as topography, soil moisture, soil type (sandy, clay, muck), or one area grows poorly, designate separate sample areas for each characteristic.
2. For each sample, take 10 to15 sub-samples across the whole sample area. Be sure to get even coverage of the entire area. Take randomly located but evenly distributed sub-samples. A zig-zag pattern works for larger sample areas. Make thin slices of soils with a shovel or trowel; to a sampling depth between three and twelve inches of soil, depending on the crop and time of year. (See the table below for instructions.) Place the sub-samples in your clean container/bucket.
3. Thoroughly mix the 10-15 sub-samples, remove rocks and scoop out a **minimum of THREE POUNDS** of the soil and place into a bag.

4. Label the bag with your
   - Name
   - Five letters and/or numbers that will help you remember where the sample came from (such as PSTR1, GRDN1).
5. If you are taking more than one sample, repeat steps 2-5 for each area.
6. Mail or deliver the samples immediately. Soil nutrient levels continue to change even after a sample is taken, due to microbiological activity. It is critical, therefore, that this activity be stopped as soon as possible after sampling (within 12 hours).
   If you are not mailing the samples that day, put the sealed samples in a refrigerator. If samples are over-saturated, put soil on a newspaper and air dry overnight in a cool location. The soil should have moisture content similar to damp sponge.
7. Fill out the Soil Sample Information Form and mail or deliver samples to:
   King Conservation District
   Attn: Soil Sampling
   800 SW 39th St, Suite 150
   Renton, WA 98057

Results are generally available within three weeks and will be emailed to you or sent via postal mail.

Guidelines for Sampling Depth

	Type of Crop	Sampling Depth
For samples taken in September and October	All samples	12"
For samples taken any other time of year	Established lawn and pasture	4"
	New lawn and pasture	6"
	Gardens	6"
	Trees & shrubs	8"
	Commercial crops	8"