Testing Your Soil's pH

What is pH?

- pH is a measure of the acidity of the soil.
- The pH scale runs from 1 to 14 where:

  pH< 7 is acidic, pH = 7 neutral, pH > 7 is basic

Why do I need to test my soil's pH?

- Nutrients and acidity can change with time and use.
- Acidity controls the availability of nutrients and beneficial organisms.
- Plants have different pH requirements:

  Blueberries and rhododendron need acidic soil, pH 4.5 to 5.5.

  Vegetables grow best in pH 6.0 to 7.0.
- Lime or sulfur may be needed to correct pH imbalance.

Where can I have my soil tested?

- pH only: Master Gardener table at local farmers markets and fairs ($2.00/ donation).

  See website for days and times: http://wmmga.org
- Full Soil Analysis: UMass Soil Testing Laboratory.

  For details go to: http://soiltest.umass.edu

When is the best time to test?

- At least 6-8 weeks after a lime, sulfur, or fertilizer application.
- Best: Fall, Second best: Early Spring.
- Any time when starting new planting area.

What do I need to collect a soil sample?

- Trowel, shovel or sampling tube
- Bucket
- Coarse sieve or screen
- Drying tray or plate
- Zip-lock bag

How do I collect samples?

- Define your sample area. If sampling multiple areas, keep samples separated by area.
- Remove a thin slice or plug of soil from surface to proper depth.

  Sample depths: 3"-4" Lawn, 6"-8" flower/vegetable garden, 10"-12" trees/shrubs
- Collect 4 -6 samples for small area, 8-12 for large.
- Mix single area's samples together in bucket.
- Scoop 1 cup mixed soil and spread on a clean plate/tray to dry.
- Sift to remove debris and place in a labeled zip-lock bag.
- Note approximate size and type of area (vegetable, flower, lawn, shrub) on bag.
- Avoid sampling when very wet.