

NebGuide Helps Demystify Soil Test Reports

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Soil testing can be useful, but test reports are often unnecessarily complex and hard to understand. It's important to know what values on a report are important and what values can be ignored. Our most recent NebGuide, [Simplifying Soil Test Interpretations for Turf Professionals](#), explains the importance of consistency during sampling and outlines the most important – science-based – values on a soil test report. **There is also a quick reference table attached to the end of the publications with very specific interpretations and management recommendations.** These recommendations are based on peer-reviewed science and not to drive fertilizer sales. Soil testing and soil test reports aren't as complicated as they may seem. This newest Turf Fact Sheet will give you confidence when you review your soil tests results in the future.

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Simplifying Soil Test Interpretations for Turf Professionals

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Soil testing can be a valuable tool for turfgrass nutrient management, but sometimes test results can be confusing. Knowing which soil test results are important can simplify turf management.

Many consider soil testing a cornerstone of turf fertilization. Soil tests estimate nutrient availability; drive management recommendations; and provide peace of mind when making decisions about fertilization. While soil tests can be useful, their results are frequently overanalyzed and overinterpreted. Sometimes soil test results can be more confusing than helpful. It doesn't have to be so difficult. The goal of this publication is to explain which soil test values are important and which values can be ignored. It is designed to be a reference and not a comprehensive guide to soil testing.

Consistency Is Key

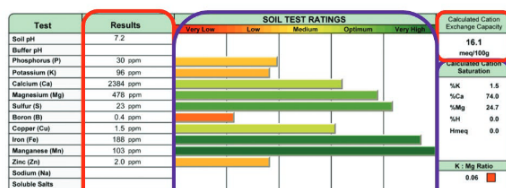
Consistency is essential for soil test results to be useful and comparable from year to year. For example, changing soil sampling depth from 3 to 6 inches will drastically change soil test results. Four inches is good for golf turf and 6 inches is recommended for lawns and athletic fields. To further ensure consistency, routinely use a lab you trust. Different laboratories using similar testing methods can still produce different soil test results.

There are many different types of soil testing methods. Some laboratories will offer many, but others may offer just a few. Pick a laboratory that offers the methods you want to use. The Mehlich-3 soil test method is preferred for turf because it works across a range of soil pH values (unlike the Bray-1 or Olsen). It extracts nutrients in the soil solution and on cation exchange sites, and it provides an estimate of plant available phosphorus. Some fertility consultants call these results "total nutrients" and nutrients in a saturated paste extract (nutrients only the soil solution) "available nutrients." Therefore, saturated paste extract method drastically underestimates nutrient availability.

Best Practices: Pick a consistent sampling depth, lab, and soil test method.

Interpreting Soil Testing Results

A soil test report has three parts: results, interpretations, and recommendations



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Download our newest NebGuide to simplify soil test interpretations and fertilizer programs this season. It can be found here:
<http://turf.unl.edu/NebGuides/g2265.pdf>