COLLECTING GARDEN SOIL SAMPLES

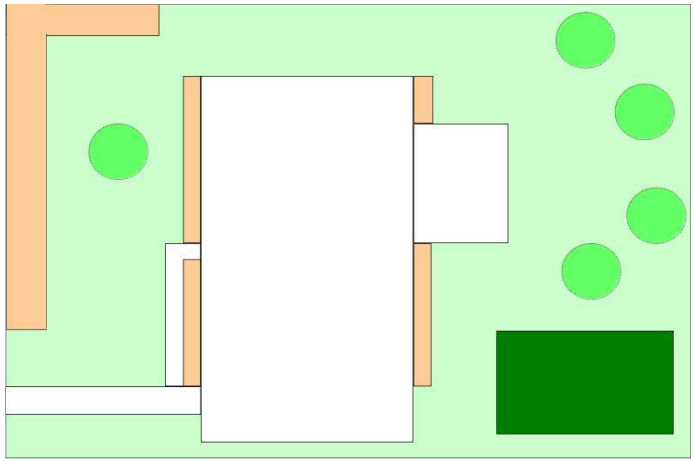
Healthy Soil & clean water =
Healthy Crops & Pasture =
Healthy Livestock & People

Soil Heath:

- **Structure**
- **Nutrients**
- **Biology**

To be effective, a soil test needs only one thing above all else – consistency! In the beginning, choose the area(s) of the garden to sample and keep going back to them with every round of testing. You should also follow the same path across your chosen area and use the same sample depth each time.

The objective is to look for a 'Representative average' for a particular area. The areas of a garden to focus on will depend on what is growing there. You can use the plan below as a guide. A vegetable or kitchen garden (dark green area below) would be one area, the flower beds (tan areas below) another. For a general purpose test (especially for a new garden) focus on the lawn areas (light green below). When specifically sampling around trees (as opposed to the lawn area they are growing in), collect the cores from the "Drip-line" region, that is, the area beneath the outmost branches. Most importantly you need to use the right implement and sample to the right depth.



***Above**: a garden layout showing the general areas that can be sampled for testing*, each with a different colour.

Collecting the Sample

Remember, you are looking for results that give a reasonable picture of the soil within the root zone of the plants. For gardens the proper depth to sample is from the surface down to 15cm.

In all cases, the best tool to use is a stainless steel core sampler - a simple apple corer that you can get from your local Supermarket will suffice.

You need to collect soil from 20 – 30 spots across the area of the garden you are interested in, mix the soil VERY thoroughly in a clean plastic bucket and take the sample (about 250g) out of this. This is best packed in a sealed plastic bag.

NB. Only use stainless steel samplers. Other metals can produce distorted results for Iron, Copper or Zinc, etc.

Research shows that a zigzag path gives the most reliable result, but choose your path carefully, so you can easily go the same way again next time.

Lastly, don't forget to complete the information sheet with important sample and site details.

Wet Samples

It is no good to take the soil sample if the soil is saturated, (that is, if water is dripping out when you hold a handful of soil in your hand).

If the soil is just damp, but not saturated, it can be put on a plate or in a paper bag, and let dry either in the sun or in the oven over night with the absolute maximum temperature between 45°and 60°Celsius.

If you have any other questions, please email us at: services@swep.com.au

SWEP Analytical Laboratories
47/174 Bridge Rd
Keysborough VIC 3173 Australia

Web: www.swep.com.au
Email: services@swep.com.au
Ph: +61 3 9701 6007 Fax: +61 3 9701 5712