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TAKE THE FIRST STEP TO A MORE BEAUTIFUL LAWN: SOIL TEST

A soil test is the right first step toward a more beautiful lawn. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service recommends home owners soil test to help determine the best fertilizer and the correct amount for their lawns based on individual soil tests, rather than general recommendations for geographic areas.

A soil test helps prevent over fertilizing your lawn. Adding more of any nutrient than a lawn can use costs extra money, may contribute to disease problems, and the excess nutrients may contaminate groundwater source. It will also give you an accurate reading on soil pH (the amount of acidity or alkalinity in the soil) and what is needed to get that back into a more productive range.

Applying just the right amount of plant nutrients prevents excessive leaf growth at mowing time. These clippings are usually bagged for trash pickup, which strains our landfill capacities.

As more home gardeners follow the "Don't Bag It" lawn care plan, where clippings are recycled back into the lawn, nutrients in these clippings are returned to the soil and, in time, back to the plant as food.

Soil test now so you will be ready for the growing season. The odds are you will need some fertilizer, but probably less than you think. Find out for sure with a soil test. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is encouraging homeowners to pick up a soil test kit at the county extension office. The kit contains simple directions, a plastic lined bag for the soil sample, an information form.

The \$10.00 cost (routine analysis) covers the soil analysis, preparation of the report and postage. For about the cost of one bag of fertilizer, you can get information that could reduce what you spend on fertilizer. Allow 10-14 working days to receive your personal soil test lab results.

The report will tell you what nutrients are already in your soil and which formula of fertilizer, if any, to use and how much you need to put on your lawn. The report recommends how much fertilizer to apply at first, as well as during the rest of the year.

It takes all the guesswork out of fertilizing your lawn. There is no more confusion about the numbers on the fertilizer bag. Instead, use your SOIL TEST report when you buy fertilizer. It is one more way you can give your lawn the best start while protecting the environment.