Horticulture Newsletter

Free Soil Testing in Arkansas

The health of your soil—including its composition, its nutrients and its ability to hold water—is all essential to the lives it supports. If your garden or lawn isn't looking so great, maybe it’s time to see how your soil is doing. Soil testing can be done in the fall or in the spring before the lawn greens.

Soil testing isn’t complicated and the samples you dig up can be taken to your local county extension office for testing. Contact Rachel Bearden at (501) 332-5267.

The University of Arkansas Cooperative Service offers free testing. Once the results are returned, it is time to add the proper fertilizer. Be certain to follow the application guidelines carefully. Too much fertilizer is as detrimental as not enough. Follow application recommendations that accompany the product. Give new growth a chance by removing debris and leaves.

Bee smart

Pollinators are an essential part of every successfully producing garden. You can encourage bees and other pollinators by providing nectar sources away from pesticides.

Under normal conditions, do not try to crowd more than one colony per square mile of vegetation. Maples, willows, dandelions, locust trees, clover, honeysuckle, and sumac are some indigenous species that aid in the food cycle.

Farmers’ Market
Summer Hours
Mon., Wed., Fri., Sat.
8:00am—1:00pm

Peppermint isn’t just for Christmas

Scent is a powerful memory trigger. For me, peppermint brings visions of the fishing trips with my grandfather and Christmas trees.

Mint is an easy herb to grow, for it reseeds itself. Due in large part to its adaptability, varieties of mint can be found growing in several different regions of the world.

In Arkansas, the plants thrive, and may become invasive, in partial sun to full sun. They like lots of water but good drainage.

In addition to flavor, popular uses for mint include:

- Garnishing fruit or meat
- Fragrant greenery in fresh arrangements
- Frozen in ice cubes

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5 Cup Salad
Tear and toss
1 C beet tops
1 C spinach
1 C lettuce
Top with
1/2 C diced tomatoes
1/2 C yellow bell pepper
1/2 C cooked bacon
1/2 C diced, boiled eggs

Jane Rice,
Advanced Master Gardener

Shout Out

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Christmas poinsettias, Valentine roses, March tulips, Easter lilies: what do we do when the initial blooms fade? For the ever hopeful gardener, many will move it outside or transplant into the flowerbeds. Keep in mind that many plant varieties that are sold in retail stores might not be climate tolerant if moved outdoors. Even the ones that can stand the climate will need an adjustment period to acclimate.

**Tulips**
If you plan to put your tulips outside, a key to their survival is to dig a deep enough hole. There must be at least 6' of soil over the top of the bulb for it to properly rejuvenate. Choose a place in well drained, sandy soil that receives full sun. More shade equals fewer and smaller blooms.
Beware: deer, squirrels, and rabbits all like to eat tulips.

**Miniature roses**
Miniature roses transplant well. Treat them as you do full size roses: prune, feed, enjoy!

**Poinsettias**
Since poinsettias are tropical plants, they cannot tolerate temperature fluctuations we see in Arkansas until June. Then they must return inside before September chilly nights.
Eating poinsettia leaves can cause numbness of lips.

**One potato, two potato**
From fast food to gourmet cuisine, the uses for the potato are endless. Originally grown by the Incas as early as 200 B.C., its popularity is paralleled as its adaptability.
Prepare the seed potatoes a week or two before you are ready to plant. Each piece should be the size of a golf ball with 1-2 eyes on it. Place the pieces in a well lit area that is at least 70 degrees to stimulate growth.
When the soil temperature reaches 45 degrees, potatoes may be planted in rows 15” apart or in mounds. Work the fertilizer deep into the ground for the roots. Cover potato eyes with 4” of soil. When the plant is 6” tall, add another 4” of soil. Tubers must not be exposed to sunlight. The optimal planting times run March 15-June 15.
Harvest can begin as early as 3 weeks after the first blooms, and it can continue 2 weeks after the foliage dies.

**Language of roses**
- Red—romantic love
- White—purity & innocence
- Yellow—friendship
- Pink—gratitude
- Orange—admiration
- Lilac—enchantment
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March is a good time to prune rose bushes in preparation for a full season of color. Prune away gangly canes less than 1/2” diameter. The shape the bush down to about 24” to encourage new growth.
Make the cuts 1/4” about an outward facing bud. Remember to cut at a 45 angle so the rain water will run off without pooling. Feed as the first leaves appear and continue monthly feeding throughout the blooming season. Stop fertilizing 4-6 weeks before the first frost.
Water the ground, but not the rose foliage. Spray for blackspot and other pests as soon as leaves appear.
Prevention is better than cure.
Change is good
My grandma always planted her garden in the same order; each row and each section grew the same vegetable year after year.

Change the location
Recent research has shown that gardens benefit from rotation of crops. For instance, tomatoes require plenty of calcium while beans and beets need higher levels of manganese. By rotating the crops at least every 3 years, the soil will be fresh resulting in higher yields.

Change the variety
By planting varieties which have different maturation cycles, you can easily avoid the feast or famine complex.

For instance, Subarctic tomatoes are reported to produce in as few as 50 days after planting. Other early tomatoes are Bush Beefsteak and Cold Set. For cherry tomatoes, try Gardener’s Delight.

Big Rainbow and Brandywine varieties take up to 90 days to produce, but when they do, these give a harvest of pound size fruit until the first frost.

Change the color
Do not limit your garden to yellow corn and red tomatoes. Be adventurous; add color. Add to the traditional purple hull peas and eggplant. Try purple varieties of corn, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes. Even speckled butter beans now come in a purple variety.

Green, green grass of home
With bated breathe we wait for the lawn to turn green, then we whine about having to mow it all summer long.

Before the lawn turns green, there are a few steps you need to take to ensure a healthy lawn.

1. Rake well, even if there are no leaves left from winter.
2. Take soil samples to the county extension service to determine what type and how much fertilizer needs to be added.
3. Apply the fertilizer.
4. Use a post emergent herbicide to control weeds.
5. Make friends with a neighborhood teenager to push the mower.

The worst mistake you can make is cutting your lawn too short. Never trim shorter than 2 inches.

Birdhouses
While helping our feathered friends, birdhouses can add charming and colorful accents to your landscape.
Thank you for taking the time to explore our very first horticulture newsletter! This was created by our very own Hot Spring County Master Gardeners. This newsletter will become a quarterly occurrence. If you ever have questions regarding horticulture or the Master Gardener program here in Hot Spring County, please let us know by calling the Extension Office at 501-332-5267. Don’t forget to come out to the plant sale on April 8th for a jump start at planting your garden and a chance to visit with our Master Gardeners!

Sincerely,

Rachel Bearden

Rachel Bearden – County Extension Agent – Agriculture/4-H

Check us out on Facebook

https://www.facebook.com/HSCMasterGardeners/