How to Take a Soil Sample

Soil testing is the best guide to soil fertility. Your soil is so much more than just dirt. It’s a matrix that teems with life, both visible and microscopic.

Soil testing can be done in the fall or in the spring before the lawn greens up. The University of Arkansas Extension Service offers homeowners free soil sampling. Soil testing isn’t complicated and the soil samples you dig up can be taken to your local county extension office for testing.

Sample areas around shrubs separately from turf. If you have a large area, sample separately areas that have been or will be managed differently.

Use the following procedure in collecting your soil sample:

Rake aside mulch or surface litter like leaves.

Take soil with a soil probe or shovel from at least 12 spots in each area to obtain a representative sample. A zigzag sampling pattern is preferred. Fertilizer & lime recommendations are no better than

Continued on page 6

In the Garden w/ Janet Carson

“You know you have dedicated volunteers when they are active in the MG program in two states! We have several MGs who have taken the training in Arkansas & Texas, and not only are they certified and doing their volunteer work in both states, but two of them have been President of their county program in AR & TX at the SAME TIME!”

“Both are hard-working individuals who have been a huge asset to our program in Miller County and helped with the 2014 State Conference, so when they called and asked if I could present to their Bowie Co. MG training, I said yes.”

…
The Mediterranean diet is the “gold standard” for lifelong good health.

Learn how to incorporate dishes of fruits, vegetables, fish, and whole grains into your meal planning as we discuss the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet.

You will prepare and taste recipes typical of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea in this hands-on workshop.

Classes are scheduled for March 19 & March 26, 2015.

There will be two classes per day. The morning class is from 9:00-11:30 a.m. and the evening class is from 6:00-8:30 p.m.

The March 19th and March 26th dates will cover Eastern and Western cuisine. The evening classes are the same as the morning classes.

Cost is $60 per person and covers both sessions (both mornings or both evenings).

For reservations, call the Miller County Extension Office at 870-779-3609 or email chaley@uaex.edu. Payment must be received before your spot is secured.

Space is limited so call soon if you would like to attend.

Oh the weather outside is frightful!!! Typically, we sing that song during the Christmas holidays – not at the end of February…but the weather has certainly been crazy, hasn’t it. We have had to postpone and reschedule many of our February projects. We have done our best to keep everyone informed, especially when we are basically operating on a day-to-day schedule … not knowing ourselves what the next day would be bringing. One day it is 70 degrees and the next day we have 5 inches of snow!!! Hopefully, we will get some relief soon.

To me, the fact that the calendar says “March” helps my feelings a whole lot. I am definitely not a winter-person. I prefer a pretty day to be working outside in my garden or flowerbeds. So let’s just keep warm thoughts going, and hopefully the spring weather will be here soon.

We do have a lot of Master Gardener opportunities happening in March. You will find all of the details of our upcoming projects described here in this newsletter.

Again, I would like to thank everyone who is already plugged in to a committee or a project. If you are not, we can help you with that!!! As I have said before, just find your passion and jump right in. there is something in Master Gardeners for everyone.

Happy Master Gardening!

Teresa Slack
President

Grow Your Groceries Gardening Workshop

The Winthrop Rockefeller Institute is offering a unique opportunity to learn about gardening in Arkansas.

Grow Your Groceries with Janet Carson is a gardening workshop that will take place at the Institute Sat., March 21 through Sunday March 22. The workshop is open to participants of a gardening skill levels, but will focus on basic techniques best suited for beginners or those without considerable experience.

Janet Carson, Extension horticulture specialist with the UofA Extension Service and state coordinator for the AR Master Gardener program will provide instruction for creating and planting raised-bed gardens. In the evening, participants will be treated to a culinary demonstration centered around the theme “garden to table.”

Admission to the workshop includes overnight lodging & breakfast the next morning.

Grow Your Groceries will utilize space at the Institute’s Heritage Farmstead for Carson’ instruction.

For more information, visit www.rockefeller institute.org/gardening or contact Jeff LeMaster at jlemaster@uawri.org or call 501-727-6226.

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On Valentine’s Day, Sue, new Committee Chair of the Courthouse Flowerbeds led a walk around to see what was needed for the courthouse beds. Seventeen Master Gardeners came to give a hand.

Once the walk around was completed, the roses were trimmed and several beds were cleaned. While we were trimming the roses, several cars pulled up and a group of folks gathered around the monument and we witnessed a wedding. Well, it was Valentine’s Day after all!

Dear Master Gardeners,

It meant so much to me that the Master Gardeners bought me a portable phone that I can keep by my bed while I am convalescing at home. What a wonderful organization the Red Dirt Master Gardeners are and I am so proud to be a member. How thoughtful of you all to think of me.

With sincere appreciation,

Nina Goldman

Eggshells: Nature’s Perfect Seed Starters

It might not be spring yet, but the time to start planting seeds is just about here! If you have a greenhouse or a sunny window at home, you can begin planting and growing seeds indoors now, to transplant in your kitchen garden. Gardeners know the importance of enriching the soil. So here’s an easy, natural and inexpensive way to give your vegetable plants a great start and enrich your garden bed in the process.

Save your egg cartons and organic eggshells. Keep an empty egg carton in the kitchen. If the egg didn’t crack evenly, place it in the egg carton anyway. You can place another eggshell on top of it. When your carton is filled with eggshells, you’re ready to fill them with a quality potting soil, seeds and water.

Continued on page 5
Why We Need Weeds
Part 2 in a series of 3
By Martha Bean

Weeds Act Like Fertilizer
Many weeds, such as comfrey, wild mustard, and most clover, have deep roots that penetrate the subsoil, where they harvest valuable nutrients and trace minerals far beyond the reach of other garden plants. As the weeds gradually decompose, the nutrients are recycled back into the soil. For example...

If you have dandelions – your soil has iron, potassium & phosphate.

If you have yarrow – your soil has iron & phosphate.

If you have comfrey – your soil has nitrogen, potassium & phosphorus.

If you have legume type weeds, such as vetch, wild lupine, clover, buckwheat, comfrey, dandelion, horsetail, wild mustard, nettle, and yarrow – your soil has nitrogen. These plants are “nitrogen fixers” (bacteria living in the plants’ roots collect nitrogen from the air and convert it into a plant-friendly fertilizer.)

That’s not all: As the annual weeds – chickweed, common mallow, lamb’s quarter, mayweed, and purslane die back, their decaying tissues contribute additional organic matter that, in turn, helps to aerate the soil and make it looser.

You can take advantage of this free fertilizer by growing these weeds as part of your rotation. Simply broadcast seeds onto the soil (an

Continued on page 6
We had a great turn out for the 4-States Agri Expo and the Master Gardeners were there in full force to help with the registration, speakers, coffee, lunch, directions, and just wherever they were needed.

Retirees Doug and John were helping out also. Our District Director, Beth Phelps came down for the event as well.

There were lots of topics for the training sessions with wonderful speakers. My favorite was on tomatoes. I’ll be looking forward to the Expo again next year.

By Andrea Thomas
Soil Sampling

Continued from page 1

Take samples in gardens, lawns and around shrubs to a depth of about 4 inches and for mature fruit trees at a depth of 12 inches.

Mix soil thoroughly from a sample area. Keep different areas separate. Discard rocks, gravel and roots.

Allow sample to air dry. Spread sample on newspapers or large paper bags for a couple of days. Do not heat the sample in an oven to speed drying.

Remove one pint for the lab sample and place in a clean container or zip top bag. Label each sample with a name that you will recognize.

Bring sample to your local extension office. Office hours are 8:00-4:30 Monday – Friday.

Cooperative Building Auditorium, Little Rock.

Cost is $20 per person. The deadline for registration is March 12th.

For information, contact Kathy at 501-912-0989 (Kathy.radcliffe@att.net) or Judy at 501-834-1008 (jw@shotgundans.com)

Eggshells: Nature’s Perfect Seed Starters

Continued from page 3

Place in front of a sunny window, or beneath a grow light to give your planting a jump start.

When it’s time to transfer your seedlings outdoors, tap the bottom of the eggshell with a hand trowel to crack it and plant the seedling within its shell directly into your garden bed. Cracking the shell with ensure proper drainage and allow the shell to start decomposing and nourishing the plant roots and garden soil.

Eggshells are an organic, biodegradable plant pot that adds calcium, nitrogen and phosphoric acid to your garden soil. Eggshells are also useful as a snail deterrent, protecting tender garden plants.

Celebrating Our Plant Heritage Seminar

This continuing education is sponsored by Pulaski Co. MGs. During this seminar you will discover the crops planted by Arkansas’ first farmers, find out where to locate & exchange heirloom seeds, learn about establishing native woodland plants along the trails near Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and visit Granny’s Garden to see the heirloom plants we all love.

This seminar takes place Thursday, March 19, from 8:00-12:30, at the University of AR

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Growing Up! Vertical Gardening

Growing Up! Vertical Gardening is fun with gardening. Diamonds, Trellises and Trees is from 11:00-noon. Horticulture manager, Aaron Wright and landscape architect Bob Byers share pointers about espalier, a centuries-old horticultural practice for training ornament and edible trees and shrubs into stunning geometric patterns on walls and trellises.

Berries is from 1-3. Pat Ford of Renee’s Berry Farm will share what he’s learned about growing great berries in almost 20 years.

Free to Members/$15 for Non-Members

Gardening

Growing Up! Vertical Gardening is from 9:30-11:00. You’ll learn lots of attractive, inexpensive ways to grow more by growing up. From planter walls to creative ways of suspending pots on fences and trellises, you’ll see dozens of ways to get off the ground for even more

trees are among the greatest assets in any landscape, but to build a garden requires environmental changes that can negatively affect these magnificent living treasures. Experts discuss everything from pests to new protection techniques like engineered soils and recycled rubber tree guards. Please choose lunch option desired.

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Why We Need Weeds

Continued from page 3

average of 1½ cups to 100-square-foot area should do just fine, work them in with a rake, and cover with additional soil to a depth three times the diameter of a seed.

Remember too that weeds are “nature’s meadow” – a blanket of living mulch that helps to conserve water and protect bare ground against heavy rains and wind that can cause soil compaction and erosion. Even shallow-rooted weeds, such as ground ivy, purslane, and oxalis, can help to prevent erosion.

from the Old Farmer’s Almanac

See part 3 next month.

Gardening

Building with Trees Workshop

MARCH 24th ● 9:00-3:00 ● Registration Required ● Magnolia Room

Trees are among the greatest assets in any landscape, but to build a garden requires environmental changes that can negatively affect these magnificent living treasures. Experts discuss everything from pests to new protection techniques like engineered soils and recycled rubber tree guards. Please choose lunch option desired.

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Gardening

Growing Up! Vertical Gardening

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