Instructions for Collecting a Soil Sample from Your Yard or Garden

Community Forum

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There's a right way and a wrong way to collect your soil sample for testing at the ***Community Forum***. This handy visual guide shows you the right way (click the image to enlarge further), and there's written instructions further below for those with a literary lean.

STEP 1: Identify the sample collection site. Areas nearest to your house are likely to have elevated lead levels if your house was painted with lead-based paint at some point. However, if this is where you garden or plan to garden, the location may be appropriate.

STEP 2: Consider drawing a sketch of the site and/or take a photo for future reference.

STEP 3: Collect a grab sample (one) or composite sample (multiple samples mixed together). Given that the ***Community Forum*** can generally only arrange for one analysis per resident, a composite sample is likely to be most appropriate.

STEP 4: Sample depth - If analyzing for gardening purposes, collect samples from roughly the root depth of the vegetable or plant. If this is unknown, or there will be multiple vegetables/plants, sample from the top six inches. If concerned about exposure to surface soils (ie: children's play areas, tracking soil into house, bare soils) collect samples from the top one or two inches.

STEP 5: Using a clean trowel, scoop or spoon, collect five to ten small samples (a few ounces) from the area of interest, place into a foil pan (or similar container), remove any large rocks, stones or debris, and mix well.

STEP 6: IF THE SOIL IS VERY MOIST or WET (stays in a ball when you squeeze it together) ALLOW IT TO DRY OVERNIGHT by leaving it spread out on the pan before bringing it in for analysis (very moist soil takes longer to analyze by FPXRF).

STEP 7: Place the soil in a ziploc, quart-size bag. Quarter to half full should be fine. Label the sample bag with your name, phone number and number of locations that you composited.

STEP 8: Bring your sample to the ***Community Forum*** for analysis!