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### 'Proper' Soil Sampling – Part II

Why would you spend two (and maybe more!) news columns talking about soil sampling? I guess for starters it's because it interests me. It's also important so that you can take some variability out of your soil testing program. The saying that 'bad data is worse than no data' can hold true to the information you get from your soil test program as well!

Proper soil sampling procedures have to include some discussion of how many samples you should take in addition to what nutrients you should test for, how deep you should pull samples, etc... While 'take as many as you need to accurately represent the tested area' is certainly true, is there a number of samples to use as a guideline?

Actually, yes! Work from North Dakota State University would indicate that pulling just eight cores as part of a single sample may only give you results that are within 25% of the actual sample value. Increasing to 21 cores per sample reduces that margin of error to 15%. To get within ten percent, you'd have to take 46 cores per sample! What's that mean? Be sure not to skimp on sample number or your accuracy may not be very good!

That's a lot of samples! Do I really have to take that many? Good question! Obviously, there comes a point when the time/work it takes to get an accurate sample becomes 'too much'. That's why our recommendation is to be sure and pull at least 15-20 cores per sample for best results. That number of cores will typically get you within two to three parts per million confidence in the results and allow you to make good recommendations from them.

Soil test programs should be designed so that you are pulling samples every two to four years – or every complete cycle of a crop rotation if possible. Pulling samples every year, at least at the start of the program, will help to build a history as well if the practice is possible.

Contact a District Offices to see if one of their soil probes is available for checkout!

### Landscape to Do List:

Maintaining landscape color often means the inclusion of flowers and flowering shrubs. As much as I'd like to say that you just plant and walk away to allow them to flower, we all know that's just not true! Maintenance is a necessity throughout the growing season – not just the flowering season!

Take peonies for instance. They've been through flowering for a good while at this point. In fact, they're probably starting to look a little rough from leaf spot disease and maybe even some grass hopper feeding. You may have even have ceased doing any weeding among them some time ago! Now may be a good time to pay them a little more attention. After September first, they are essentially dormant and can be cut back to clean up the beds a little. Cut the leaves off close to the ground and compost or discard.

If you are trying to maintain spring flowering shrubs like Forsythia, Pyracantha, Lilac, Cotoneaster, Weigela, and others, you may actually need to consider a watering program! These early spring flowering shrubs set flower buds during August and September. Unfortunately, some areas have been dry during that time period and supplemental watering may be in order. Check by using a long rod pushed in to the ground. If it goes in easily, moisture levels are probably fine. If not, it may be time to consider supplemental watering!