



Apply Fertilizer Only When You Need To

Before applying fertilizer find out what your lawn needs by having your soils tested. Pay special attention to things like: pH, phosphorous, nitrogen and organic matter.

- pH, the more or less acidic your soil is, plays a role in how nutrients are consumed by your lawn.
- Phosphorous, this nutrient often exists at the right levels in your soil naturally, so when you apply more it is not readily absorbed and most leaves the site with water run-off.
- Nitrogen, this nutrient may from time to time be deficient in a lawn, but can easily be recaptured through natural practices, such as mulching grass clippings back onto your lawn.
- Organic Matter, the key to all healthy lawns is the amount of organic content. Soils void of life, or with little organic content, require frequent watering and nutrient applications to stay green. While on the other hand lawns teeming with life and having an organic content greater than 5% will stay green with little or no effort.

How can I get my soil tested?

- One way to have your soil tested is to sample and submit your soil to the Iowa State Extension Office. The cost for this soil test ranges from \$8 and \$20 depending on what your soil is being tested for. For more information visit <http://soiltesting.agron.iastate.edu/analyses/Soil.html>.
- An additional option is to take your soil samples to a local testing laboratory. There are two testing labs in

the Iowa Quad City Area: Quad City Analytical 563.289.3373 and Quad City Testing Laboratory 563.391.8500.

- Lastly, you can purchase a soil testing kit and test your own soil. These kits are available at most home and garden centers. While not as comprehensive as the prior options, this is a good place to start.

Sampling and Reviewing your Soil

If you sample your soil, be sure to sample from 3 areas that represent an unbiased example of your soil quality and/or the soil quality of the area you wish to improve. You will want to extract your sample from at least 6" deep and remove any thatch before sending your sample in. Be sure to label your samples with the location they were taken so you are able to match the results of the test to the area of concern.

After reviewing your soil report, make a plan. Does applying fertilizer make the most sense, or should you spend a little time aerating and applying a thin layer of compost to improve organic content and soil porosity? Residents should specifically look at those items that have the greatest potential to reduce contaminated run-off and personal monetary expense (watering and chemical costs).

Applying Fertilizer

If you are applying fertilizer on your own be sure the spreader is calibrated. If you are contracting someone to apply fertilizer or pesticides, ask them for a copy of their pesticide applicator license in the State of Iowa. Keep in mind that applications of these materials should be avoided if rain is predicted within the next 48 hours.

