

# Beth Young

G A R D E N D E S I G N

*Info Sheet #2-A*

## Why Test Your Soil?

### ***Why test soil?***

Soils testing is the one of the nicest things that you can do for your garden. It is the first step to getting your plants to grow faster with more blooms and healthier, more disease-resistant foliage. It will take the guesswork out of fertilization, and save you from costly over-fertilization. For my clients, I recommend that at least one sampling to be conducted per planting area.

### ***Why send it off to a lab?***

Store-bought tests will measure the total amounts of nutrients in the soil. However, because of the physiology of plants and soil texture, not all of those nutrients are available for the plant to use. Soils testing laboratories measure only the soil nutrients that are expected to become plant-available.

Soils testing laboratories are aware that, at the molecular level, micronutrients in the soil change over time. Therefore, their calculations are taken over a time span, rather than the snapshot approach that is used by store-bought tests.

Soils testing labs also test for over-fertilization of a particular nutrient, a common problem in residential landscapes. For example, over-fertilization of nitrogen results in "salt burn," manifested by scorched and yellow leaves or withered leaf margins. A test will include recommendations to ameliorate the problem.

### ***What are the costs?***

A thorough test will range from \$7 (usually through universities) to \$40, and will include fertilizer and amendment recommendations. Oregon State University no longer conducts tests due to budget cutbacks.

### ***When should I test?***

Any time of year would work, but testing in the fall is a good idea because (1) you can avoid the spring rush and, presumably, get your results back faster, and (2) if your soil's pH is low, fall testing will allow you ample time to apply lime before spring growth occurs. You do not want to add lime at the same time that you add fertilizer. Add lime, then wait at least a month before adding soil nutrients (fertilizer). On the other hand, if the soil pH is high, sulfur may be applied with the fertilizer in the spring.