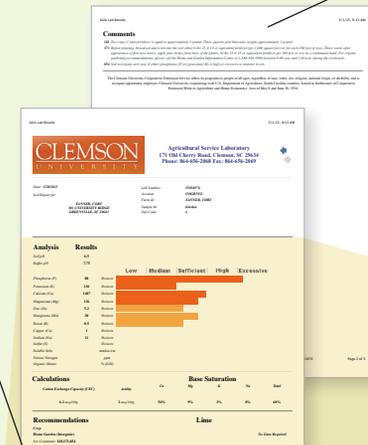


MAKE SENSE OF YOUR soil report

NEAR THE TOP OF YOUR SOIL REPORT, look at “Soil pH” under the “Analysis/Results” section. This is a measure of your soil’s acidity—lower numbers indicate more acidity. For most crops, a slightly acid soil (pH of 5.8 to 6.5) is preferred. If the pH falls below that range, lime will most likely be recommended.



ALSO IN THE “ANALYSIS/RESULTS” section, you’ll see a list of your soil’s nutrient levels. These numbers indicate the actual quantity of plant-available nutrients in the soil—in other words, the nutrients the plants can use. The two most important values are on top: phosphorous and potassium. Nitrogen, being the nutrient that plants need the most of and the one that most quickly leaves the soil, is always assumed to be deficient on soil tests, so every soil report will recommend nitrogen fertilization.



FINALLY, IN THE “COMMENTS” SECTION, each comment is numbered to match the crop(s) you indicated on your test sample. Since your soil analysis might test for up to four crops per sample, it’s important to match the appropriate comments to the corresponding crop. Some comments are simply general information. Others contain specific fertilizer recommendations, typically given in pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Fertilizer recommendations are based on how much nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) should be added to the soil for optimal plant growth. These are the same nutrients, commonly expressed as N-P-K, you see on fertilizer bags (e.g., 10-10-10, 16-4-8, 0-0-60) and tell us how much of each major plant nutrient is in each bag of fertilizer as a percentage by weight. A 50-pound bag of 10-10-10 contains 10 percent, or five pounds, of each nutrient. Plants rarely need equal amounts of these minerals, so test reports usually recommend imbalanced fertilizers, such as calcium nitrate (15.5-0-0) and muriate of potash (0-0-60). By reading the numbers, you can figure out the best mix of fertilizers to apply.



DON'T WORRY MUCH ABOUT THE BAR GRAPHS. If there's anything you need to be concerned about, recommendations will show up in the “Comments” section at the end of the report. And don't be alarmed if you see one or more nutrients reported as “excessive.” Excessive simply means there is more of that nutrient than the plants can use, not necessarily enough to cause harm. The only practical way to deal with an excessive nutrient is not to apply any more of it. Your report will likely recommend a fertilizer that doesn't contain that ingredient.



NOW LOOK AT THE “RECOMMENDATIONS” SECTION. On the right side of the page, under “Lime,” you'll see the recommended number of pounds of lime to spread per 1,000 square feet (or per acre). If lime is not needed, the report will say “No Lime Required.”

If your soil pH is too high for certain acid-loving crops, such as blueberries, azaleas and camellias, the report will state “No Lime Required,” but there may be additional advice under the “Comments” section that recommends lowering soil pH by applying sulfur. If so, contact your county's Extension office for information about the amount of sulfur to apply.