

HOW TO GET YOUR FREE SOIL TEST

To help you select the best plants for your site, bring a sample of your soil to the nursery and get a **free soil pH test**. It is important to use the correct soil sampling method, so please read on below.

What is pH?

The pH of the soil is a measure of acidity or alkalinity. It basically indicates how sour or sweet the soil is. The pH scale ranges from 0 to 14, with 7 being neutral. Values below 7 indicate an acid soil, and above 7, alkaline.

Because the pH scale is logarithmic, a pH change by 1 unit means it is 10 times more acidic or alkaline. Typically, Western Australian soils have a pH range between 4 and 8.5. In the Leschenault catchment, soils are more alkaline near the limestone-based coastal sands. Soils further inland and in most agricultural areas are naturally acidic.

When and how to test soil pH

Test your pH in autumn when the soil is relatively dry and is free of excessive organic material.

When sampling, follow these guidelines:

- Do not mix different soil types, and sample into clean containers.
- Do not sample after heavy rain or after watering. If you have applied fertiliser, wait three to four weeks for the soil to adjust.
- Take the soil from the top 20 cm with a trowel, spade or auger and avoid weeds and plant roots in the sample.
- Select at least five random spots in the area to be tested, and mix the soil to get an average reading. Then take about a cup-full as a sub sample.

If you want more accurate results, take a sample to be tested to a soil laboratory which provides this service (check in yellow pages). Laboratories may report a pH reading in water (H₂O) or in 1:5 calcium chloride (CaCl₂). Readings in calcium chloride are considered a better indicator of acidity.

By selecting a local plant suited to the pH of your soil, there is no need for the hassles of modifying your soil.

Acknowledgement

These notes are drawn from Department of Agriculture and Food *Gardennote* No. 174 Soil pH and plant health in the home garden.

Further information

To read the full *Gardennote* and other downloadable publications, go to www.agric.wa.gov.au and click on Environment; Soil and landscapes; Soil acidity.