

A Good Time for Soil Testing

I've answered a few calls this week concerning the yellowing of leaves on ornamental plants, like azaleas and roses. This time of the year, we start showing nutritional deficiency as plants have ceased growing and finished using nutrients in the soil. Nitrogen and potassium are two primary nutrients which show up as yellowing on leaves when they are deficient. Nitrogen is mobile in the plant; therefore, lower leaves (older) leaves begin to yellow first.

Nitrogen and potassium are also very soil mobile. When we have heavy rains, as we did last week, this leaches mobile nutrients down in the soil. This is nothing to be concerned about. As plants are losing their leaves, they are preparing to enter a dormancy period. Until we start back fertilizing in spring, we can use this time to perform soil tests.

- 1) Pick a location and collect 8 – 10 samples from each location. This is your lawn, garden, trees, shrubs, etc. Make sure to get a representative sample for each area.
- 2) Sample soil from your lawn at a depth of 4 inches. For gardens, ornamentals, fruit trees, etc., sample at a depth of 6 inches.
- 3) Use clean sampling tools and containers to avoid contaminating the soil sample. Never use tools or containers that have been used for fertilizer or lime. Tools like trowels, shovels, spades, hand probes or hand augers may be used to collect samples.