

**FOR RELEASE WEEK OF APRIL 6, 2016**

**TITLE: THE SCOOP ON SOIL**

**BY: RICKY ENSLEY, COUNTY EXTENSION COORDINATOR**

**POLK COUNTY EXTENSION, 20 N. MAIN STREET, CEDARTOWN**

**770-749-2142 uge2233@uga.edu**

How sweet is the soil around your home? If you don't know, you need to find out. But don't go out and taste a spoonful – have it tested by bringing a sample to the Polk County Extension Office.

“Sweet” soil is simply soil that is only slightly acid. The pH is one of the most important things to know about your soil. It shows how acid or sweet your soil is. The lower the number, the more acidic is the soil.

It's important to know your soil's pH because plants have a certain pH level at which the nutrients in the soil are most available to them. If the pH of your soil is too low or too high, your garden and flower plants, shrubs and fruit trees could be starving for those nutrients, even if they are right there in the soil.

So what's the best pH? It all depends on the type of plants that you are trying to grow. Take centipede grass, for example. The pH for good centipede growth is 5.5, although it will tolerate a pH below 5.0. Other grasses, like fescue, zoysia, and Bermuda grass need a higher pH, somewhere around 6.0. Vegetable gardens and most flowers and shrubs grow best at a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. Acid-loving plants, like azaleas and blueberries, however, grow best at a lower soil pH, 5.5 to 6.0.

If you find you have a low pH, add dolomitic or agricultural lime. Dolomitic limestone contains both calcium and magnesium which corrects the soil pH and helps plants in producing healthy, vigorous growth. Fortunately, that may be the cheapest thing your soil needs.

So, whatever plants you have, whether they are fruit trees, shrubs, vegetables, forages, or turf, you will not know if you need to add lime to your soil, or how much lime to add, if you don't know your soil's pH. So you need to test your soil occasionally to know its' pH.

Take a soil sample that is representative of the area. To do that, get samples from 10 to 15 spots. You need to go down from 3 to 4 inches deep for each area or type of

plant that you wish to test, for example, your lawn or garden or flower beds. Then after thoroughly mixing the 10 to 15 samples from your lawn area, for instance, then remove and place a pint or about one cup of soil for testing in one of our special soil test bags. Bring your soil samples to the Polk County Extension office and we will mail your samples to the University of Georgia's Soil Testing Lab in Athens. We should your test results back in about 7 – 10 days.

If you have questions about soil testing, contact the Polk County Extension office by phone at 770-749-2142, or by email at [uge2233@uga.edu](mailto:uge2233@uga.edu).