



### Resolve to improve soil by testing it

Each year I talk with hundreds of people who have problems growing everything, from their lawn grasses, flowers and vegetable gardens, to their shrubs and trees. I ask some diagnostic questions to help me determine their problem and get them on the right

track, but many times the information I need to help them is missing.

It's very important to know if the nutritional needs of the plants are being met. This means more than applying fertilizers; it also takes into account the condition of the soil. With the start of a new year, make it your resolution to take soil samples where you are going to make new plantings or where you are having problems. It's impossible to tell what the soil needs by just looking at it.

Soil samples will tell us first if you have soil pH issues. If pH is the problem, then no amount of fertilizer or other care is going to cure your problem; we will have to either lower the pH with sulfur or raise it with lime to accommodate the crop you are trying to grow.

Liming is a common practice here because our native soils are acid. Lime would correct low pH, supply calcium and magnesium, promote bacterial activity in the soil, increase the availability of phosphorous and reduce the availability of toxic elements that can reduce growth and yield in some plants. The unanswered question would be, how much do I need? The soil lab will react your soil with lime and calculate a rate for your soil and crop.

If you have had tomato problems where the bottom of the tomato turns black just about the time it gets ripe, that is called blossom-end rot and it is common. That sounds like a disease but it is really a calcium availability problem that can be corrected or prevented by using a simple soil sample.

In addition to pH you will get an analysis of how much phosphorous, potassium, magnesium, calcium, sulfur, copper and zinc are in the soil. You will also get a recommendation on how to correct any problems and how to fertilize based on what you intend to plant.

To take a soil sample, get a small shovel and a bucket. Use the tip of the shovel and go down 2-4 inches into the

soil and put that soil in the bucket. Within the area that you want to sample randomly select 10 -20 places to pull soil and place all those subsamples in one bucket. There is a temptation to pull the soil from just one spot and send that in, but resist that temptation. The soil sample is nothing more than an average of the soil in an area and the more subsamples you take to make the sample, the better information we get back.

Now mix the subsamples together with your hands and pull out 1 pint of the mixture to be sent in for analysis. Place the pint of soil in any clean container such as a plastic bag or jar and bring it to my office to be submitted to the lab. The cost is \$10 per sample, and you will receive the results usually within 10 working days. Soil sample collection kits are also available from the Master Gardeners' booth on the first Saturday of each month at the Livingston

Parish Farmers' Market in Denham Springs.

You may have noticed that you usually get sick with flu or other ailments when you are more stressed, run down and not eating properly. Plants are the same; if you can keep them actively growing they are less susceptible and more resistant to diseases and insect damage. Gardening projects can require a lot of energy and financial resources, so it only makes sense to do everything possible to make the project successful. Resolve to get a soil test and then do it!

For more information on these or related topics contact *Kenny Sharpe, LSU Ag Center County Agent, at 225-686-3020 or visit our website at [www.lsuagcenter.com/livingston](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/livingston). The Livingston office is located at 20180 Iowa Street in the old Livingston Parish Courthouse, Room 106, Livingston.*

### Meet the President

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stopped payment to C-Del because the previous council directed that it not be paid. See related story about the first council meeting on page 23.)

Ricks named other issues facing the parish that will have to be addressed: animal control, overflow of the parish prison and health insurance for parish employees. Although the budget is tight, he believes the outlook for the parish is bright, saying "exciting things are coming, and we'll tackle the issues together."

Ricks acknowledged there is "a learning curve for the job of parish president, and there is no job description that prepares you. I still have a lot to learn."

He believes his experience and knowledge of government financing and public infrastructure will help him serve the parish. Ricks is a former Denham Springs City Councilman and served on boards of the Livingston Parish Sewer District 1, the DS Police & Fire Civil Service and the DS Planning and Zoning Commission. He was operations manager with Alvin Fairburn & Associates Engineering Firm for four years.

He said, "I will serve the people of Livingston Parish and will continually strive to earn their trust and support."

Contact: 225-686-2266, [info@livingstonparishla.gov](mailto:info@livingstonparishla.gov).

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