

SOREC Experts Expound

# Know your soil: Test a sample

BY GORDON B. JONES, PHD

Greetings from your county extension agent! Spring is just around the corner, and now is a great time to make plans for your garden, pasture, or hemp field. Testing a soil sample to evaluate your soil fertility is the best way to know what might be needed for a bountiful crop.

At the Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center (SOREC) in Central Point, researchers and extension educators collect, test, and share knowledge about local soils, thereby improving agricultural and horticultural practices in the region. My job is to provide informal education and technical assistance to farmers and landowners in Jackson and Josephine counties. I help with all sorts of problems but focus on soil management, pastures, hayfields, and cover crops. In this article I will walk you through the steps to properly test your soils.

Because soils vary across the landscape, you will need to “lump and split” to get a useful sample. By splitting, I mean dividing your property into different areas based on usage. You’ll want to take separate soil samples for your garden, pasture, hemp field, or front lawn. Next, you’ll want to combine the samples of the surface soil from each area—pasture, garden, etc.—into one sample that

represents the entire property. This is the lumping.

Any type of soil samplers, used correctly, will collect a vertical soil core with a consistent proportion of surface soil to soil from deeper depths. In general, you should take samples six inches below the surface or four inches for lawns and no-till fields and deeper than six inches for certain crops. For tracking changes in your soil over time, it is critical that you pick one sampling depth and stick with it. Nutrients are generally concentrated near the soil surface, so the deeper you sample the more you dilute your surface sample with subsoil. For example, in most garden and agricultural settings, a six-inch-deep soil sample will predictably have higher nutrient concentrations than an eight-inch-deep sample.

Grab your soil corer, a plastic bucket, a few zip-top bags, and a marker, and you’re ready to take some samples. Label the bags with a code you can remember that designates the area where you’ll collect the sample. Wander across the selected area and collect 15 to 20 cores down to the depth you’ve chosen. Combine those soil cores in the bucket (see photo), remove any rocks or big chunks of plant material, and mix the

soil together. Place about two cups of that mixed soil into a labeled bag and you have a sample ready for analysis.

Next, select a laboratory to analyze your samples. A google search for “Oregon analytical labs” will turn up Oregon State University (OSU) publication EM 8677, which lists labs that run agricultural soil tests. The prices and services vary, but for \$20 to \$30, most labs offer a routine soil test, which will measure pH (acidity), lime requirement, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and organic matter—a good starting point for most crops and situations. Many labs can measure other physical, chemical, and biological properties of soil, heavy metal concentrations, and pesticide residues, but some tests are expensive and difficult to interpret. If you’re just starting out, I recommend going with a routine analysis. The lab will usually email the test results in pdf format, often including recommendations for fertilizer and lime needs. If recommendations are not provided, check out the OSU bulletin, “Soil Test Interpretation Guide (EM 1478),” which is available online.

Please get in touch with us at SOREC if you want help developing a soil-testing plan, need to borrow a soil probe, or could use advice on how to interpret your results. And check out our website

at [extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec) to sign up for soil-related classes this spring on March 28 and April 25.

Happy soil testing!

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There are many types of soil samplers, and we have some to borrow. Visit SOREC at 569 Hanley Road, Central Point.



Combine 15 to 20 soil cores from each area of your property to get a representative sample for analysis.

## New SNYP clinic available for Applegate pets

BY LAURA AHEARN



If you spay or neuter your cat or dog, especially when young, odds are it will live longer. For over two decades, Spay/Neuter Your Pet (SNYP), a volunteer nonprofit group, has helped thousands of animals through reduced-rate vouchers and referrals to veterinarians in southern Oregon. In February, SNYP took this work to a new level with a low-cost spay/neuter clinic serving pet owners, rescue groups, and shelters in a four-county area. This is a remarkable opportunity for our community to stop the procreation of unwanted pets and to promote the well-being of the pets we already have.

Pet owners have clear economic incentives to spay or neuter their pets.

This quick routine procedure costs far less than the expense of vaccinating, deworming, feeding, and caring for litters of puppies or kittens. If these reasons aren’t enough, owners should spay and neuter simply because they want their pets to enjoy longer lives. Banfield Pet Hospital, the world’s largest veterinary practice, analyzed data on 2.2 million dogs and 460,000 cats and found that spayed and neutered pets outlive untreated pets by these margins: male cats, 62 percent; female cats, 39 percent; male dogs, 18 percent; and female dogs, 23 percent.

Healthy puppies and kittens can be spayed or neutered starting at eight weeks of age. Kittens may start reproducing as early as four months of age, so you don’t want to put off scheduling the procedure!

The clinic’s soft opening in mid-February served shelter partners in Jackson, Josephine, and Siskiyou counties, as well as community (feral) cats. Beginning March 1, the clinic will open to residents of Jackson, Josephine, Siskiyou, and Klamath counties and

include subsidized spay and neuters for low-income residents. SNYP expects its annual volume of spays and neuters to increase from 3,000 to 5,000 in the first year of operation.

“For the first time in 21 years, we’ll be able to expand beyond Jackson County to neighboring counties,” said Sally Mackler, SNYP board president. “We will now be able to provide spay and neuter services to the general public as well as to shelters and rescue groups.”

SNYP has recruited Dr. Mike Maynard, a veterinarian specially trained in spay/neuter techniques, from Colorado. Subsidized services will be available to those needing financial assistance and for community cats. SNYP plans to expand services in the future to provide discount incentives for pit bulls and Chihuahuas. Sadly, shelters and rescue groups see more extreme levels of abandonment of these breeds.

The opening of SNYP’s new clinic will advance the work of other animal-welfare groups, like Friends of the Animal Shelter (FOTAS), in reducing the number of abandoned and stray animals and to find homes for those pets that end up dumped or living on the streets. During the holiday season the Jackson County shelter was so crowded, with increasing delays in getting animals spayed and neutered and on to their

new adoptive homes, that FOTAS volunteers needed to take animals home for overnight or more extended stays. “FOTAS has been working with and supporting SNYP for the last two decades,” says FOTAS president, Tilly Gibbs, “and we are thrilled that SNYP has reached this major milestone.”

In 2018, the Jackson County shelter took in 1,887 dogs and 1,660 cats, a slight increase in dogs and a slight decrease in cats compared to 2017. The vast majority of these animals had not been spayed or neutered. According to shelter manager, Barbara Talbert, it cost Jackson County around \$60,000 to have these animals spayed and neutered, which is a precondition to adoption. “Low-cost spay and neuter services are very much needed in this county,” says Talbert. “It is currently taking up to two weeks to schedule surgeries. The SNYP clinic should significantly reduce the waiting time for our adoptable animals.”

The SNYP Spay/Neuter Clinic is located at 111 North Pacific Highway in Talent. Starting March 1, you can make an appointment online at [spayneuter.org](http://spayneuter.org) or by phoning 541-858-3325.

Support the SNYP clinic. Spay and neuter your pets. Let’s make ours a “no animal unwanted” community.

Laura Ahearn

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