

Quick reference soil sampling guide



Before you start: Plan your sampling

- Purpose:** Make sure you are clear about why you are soil sampling and what you will test for. This will impact how you collect and handle your sample/s.
- Timing:** Samples for monitoring and/or trend analysis should be taken at the same time each year. Ensure your sampling location has not had lime or fertiliser containing P, K, or S applied in the last 3 months. When testing for mineral N, sample just prior to a N fertiliser application. Do not sample sooner than 10 days, ideally longer, after an N application. Sample at the beginning of the week to ensure your samples do not get stuck at a courier depot over the weekend.
- Health & Safety:** Be aware of the risks if operators are working at your sampling location.

On the day: Before you head out

- Equipment:** Ensure you have all the required equipment, including corer, buckets, pre-labelled sample bags, chilly bin, icepacks (especially if undertaking nitrogen testing), and phone or GPS unit for transect/pattern tracking. Ensure previously used equipment is clean.
- Prepare your test forms:** Before heading out to the paddock to sample, prepare all your bags and forms so you can courier or drop the samples off the same day. You will generally need the following information for the test forms:
 - Sample name/ID
 - Sample date
 - Crop/land use
 - Core depth (e.g. 0–15 cm, 0–30 cm)
 - Test/s requested
- Note any special requirements i.e. sample temperature.

Collecting the sample

- Once you have arrived at the paddock or area to sample, plan the transect (i.e. GPS point at the start and end) or pattern.
- Take 15–20 soil cores at your set depth across the transect, sampling at ~10 m intervals.
 - Sample at 0–15 cm for general nutrient/fertility testing.
 - Sample at 0–30 cm for nitrogen testing.
- Ensure you remove any crop or plant residue from the soil surface before taking the core. Avoid unrepresentative areas, like headlands, past building sites, end of rows, humps and hollows, and animal camps.
- Place the cores into a bucket and mix well to create a composite sample.

Handling and transport

- You will need ~500 g of soil to send to the lab. Take a sub-sample from the bucket and place into the labelled sample bag.
- Seal and place the sample somewhere cool and out of the sun. If collecting samples for mineral N testing, the samples should be packed with icepacks in a chilly bin to bring the temperature down to < 4°C as soon as possible.
- Complete the rest of your testing if taking multiple samples. Keep collected samples cool and use a chilly bin on hot days.
- Ship your samples with a courier as soon as possible (ideally the same day), or if close, drop off at the lab. Store the samples in a refrigerator if sending on the day is not possible, or over the weekend if sampling at the end of the week.

For more information, refer to Soil Nutrient Sampling for Vegetable Crops: User Guidance, available on the VR&I website.

