



## A Good Time To Test

By Zach Nicoludis, agronomist, Central Region | March 3, 2018



*Measuring organic matter content can determine where in the soil profile an issue has developed and what corrective practices should be performed.*

The slow transition from winter to spring provides time to test irrigation water quality and soil fertility. It is also a good time to determine baseline values for putting green organic matter content, especially if there are visible signs of significant layering in the soil profile or chronic concerns about soft, wet putting surfaces.

**Water Quality:** Do you know if your irrigation water is affected by droughts or road salt used during winter? Poor water quality can impact nutrient absorption, plant protectant efficacy and overall turf health. A few timely water tests per year are advised if water is collected and stored in holding ponds for irrigation.

**Soil Fertility:** Is your fall fertilizer program working? Nutrient availability in the soil can vary throughout the year. Regular testing provides valuable information that guides well-planned fertility programs. Samples from putting greens, tees and fairways should be tested for soil fertility at least once per year so any deficiencies can be corrected before major issues develop. Understanding soil fertility will also prevent unnecessary nutrient applications.

**Organic Matter Content:** Do you know if putting green organic matter is being properly managed by cultural practices? Some organic matter is necessary; it provides turf

resiliency. But, too much organic matter creates soft, inconsistent playing conditions. Since visual inspection is not always accurate, putting green samples should be sent to a laboratory for an organic matter content analysis once per year.

Using data to guide decisions can create savings that far exceed the cost of testing. Late winter or early spring testing makes it possible to adjust agronomic programs before major inputs are applied. Contact your regional [USGA Agronomist](#) for assistance with selecting a reputable laboratory and help with interpreting test results.

The USGA *Green Section Record* offers articles that provide additional information on managing [water quality](#), [soil fertility](#) and [organic matter content](#).

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