

Tips:

Sampling Procedures

The most important role a superintendent plays in the testing process is insuring proper sample collection. Since all analyses and recommendations are based on the samples received in the laboratory, it's imperative that those submitted to a laboratory are representative. If they aren't, the lab results may be meaningless. Sample collection procedures vary based on the location of the material.

Greens

This sample procedure is for evaluation of existing greens to document the profile and/or diagnose physical problems. A 3-inch diameter PVC pipe should be cut about 24 inches to 30 inches long to extend down through the profile into the subgrade.

Bevel the outside of one edge to provide a sharper end to cut into the green. Drill two opposing holes into the other end into which a metal rod or rope can be inserted to help pull out the core. Drive the beveled end of the PVC pipe into the green far enough to reach subgrade, which is needed at the base of the core to hold in the gravel and/or choker layers. Pull the core out, and pack the ends with newspaper to prevent shifting and tape shut. Label the sample.

Fairways or native soils

The sample procedure is primarily for evaluation and documentation of the properties of native materials. Recommended tools for sample

collection are a clean, stainless-steel or chrome plated soil probe or shovel, a tarp or piece of canvas, and a plastic bucket.

Large areas should be divided into separate sampling units based on topography, vegetative cover, previous use, soil color and other visual differences. Small, non-uniform areas such as wet, rocky or eroded spots should always be a separate sampling unit. One sample can be submitted from each unit and should consist of a composite of numerous, randomly collected sub-samples.

The sub-samples can be collected with a soil probe or a shovel and combined in a plastic bucket, which can be sent as a sample. However, to reduce shipping costs, it can be portioned out as follows: Dump the bucket on a tarp or canvas and mix thoroughly. Split the material into quarters and discard opposing quarters. Mix thoroughly, split and discard again. Continue to do this until 1 gallon remains and bag it.

The average sample depth is 12 inches, but in some cases it may be necessary to sample deeper. Anytime there's a difference observed in the soil layers, it should be noted and the layers divided into separate samples. Record the depth of sampling and label each sample appropriately with a permanent marker, maintaining a record or map of sample locations.

Bottom line

The importance of good sampling techniques can't be overemphasized. While it's imperative that a quality laboratory is used for testing, keep in mind that the results obtained from a lab can only be as good as the sample you provide them.

This article was written by Sam Ferro and Mike Mealman of Olathe, Kan.-based Turf Diagnostics and Design, a laboratory and consulting firm serving the golf course and sports turf industries.

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