

Forget the Tea Leaves, Read the Soil Cores Instead

When you are taking soil samples, take a few minutes to take the next step: Examine the soil cores that you have taken and record your observations. If you take the soil samples at the same time each year and you make and record the same observations each year, you will develop an ongoing data source that will give you a strong indication of the effectiveness of your soil chemistry monitoring and correction activities, the success or failure of your thatch control strategies and the outcome of your efforts to grow and protect your turf's root structure.

The time you use to take soil samples is an excellent time to monitor the success of

your other turf management efforts. Recording observations on the health of your soil and the plants that grow in it can pay major benefits in as little time as a year. You can examine the core samples for thatch depth, condition and level of decomposition, root mass, distribution and health, soil layering, compaction and pan formation and soil structure, particle size and distribution, and pore space size and quantity.

These observations of the current physical soil conditions combined with the results of the soil testing should give you valuable data for making a decision.

—Editor's note: This is reprinted from *TurfGrass Trends*, November/December 1992.

CORE SAMPLE OBSERVATION FORM

SITE _____ FACILITY _____
 LOCATION _____ STREET _____
 DATE _____ CITY _____
 TAKEN BY _____ STATE _____

► Thatch

Depth _____ (mm/in.) Condition dry _ normal_ wet _
 Root invasion none_ light_ medium_ heavy _
 Decomposition none_ 25%_ 50% _ 75% _ 100%_

► Roots

Mass thin _ medium_ dense _
 Depth _____ (mm/in.)
 Distribution poor _ fair _ good _
 Color white _ tan _ dark _
 Health vigorous_ static _ damaged_

► Soil structure

Compaction starts at _____ (mm/in.) ends at _____ (mm/in.)
 Compaction density: light _ medium _ heavy _
 Layering: starts at _____ (mm/in.) ends at _____ (mm/in.)
 Layering material: stone _ clay _ organic _
 Layer density: light _ medium _ heavy _
 Pan formation: starts at _____ (mm/in.) ends at _____ (mm/in.)
 Particle size: fine _ medium _ coarse _
 Particle distribution: uniform_ migrating_ stratified_
 Pore space size: small _ medium _ large _