120 E 161st Street, Westfield, Indiana 46074
Phone: 317-600-2807 • Email: customerservice@ufseeds.com
website: ufseeds.com

URBAN FARMER
LOVE THE EARTH

A guide to understanding soil pH

One of the main reasons crops may not produce like they should is because the soil pH doesn't create the right environment for the crops to thrive.

What it is:

Soil pH is the measurement of the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. Soil pH can range from 1 (highly acidic) to 14 (highly alkaline). Most plants require amore neutral soil pH of around 7, but some prefer more acidic or alkaline soil. Acidic-soil loving plants include blueberries, azaleas and other alkaline-loving plants including lilacs and clematis.

How to determine soil pH:

Many gardeners use do-it-yourself kits available for purchase to determine that their soil's pH is. However, some gardeners may require a much more accurate reading. These readings can be produced by sending a sample of your soil to the local Cooperative Extention office, where they will evaluate your soil for you. Soil pH must be between .5 points of the plant's requirements to grow in. If your soil is .5 points above or below what your vegetables require, you must amend it in order to grow those plants.

How to amend soil:

There are several ways to adjust your soil's pH to more adequately grow the plants you want, but over time, a soil's pH will naturally revert back to what it was before you amended it. The easiest way to amend a soil is to only amend the areas where you will be growing crops that require a different pH than the soil provides. To raise a soil's pH if it is too acidic, you must add lime. To lower a pH of a soil if it is too alkaline, add sulfur. Reapply the agricultural limestone or powdered sulfur in the late fall or whichever season is the off-season for vegetable growth. If you make the amendments in the spring, do so at least three weeks prior to planting in the soil so the amendment has time to set in, as well as it won't affect the plant roots that way. You should re-test your soil's pH every three years to make sure you don't need to make any adjustments.

Soil test kits available at ufseeds.com

When adding amendments, the required amount varies depending on the soil's texture. The recommended addition should be listed on the bag of agricultural limestone or powdered sulfur.

A natural amendment is possible as well. To naturally increase a soil's pH, add organic items such as ground eggshells, ground clamshells, bonemeal, hardwood ashes or

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ground oyster shells. If you want to lower a soil's pH naturally, add organic materials like aged sawdust, leaf mold, wood chips, cottonseed meal, coffee grounds, pine needles, oak leaves, fresh manure and peat moss.

Sometimes, areas with low rainfall can create accumulated salt in the soil, leading to a higher pH. If this is the case, flush the salts out by watering with non-saline water and add compost.

Check out our soil test kits and everything you need to get started at ufseeds.com!

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