

Extension Ag News

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Editor's Note

This is the first issue of a four-county agriculture newsletter. Agriculture Extension Agents serving Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene and Louisa Counties are collaborating to offer in-depth information on a wide variety of topics. **Extension Ag News** will be published quarterly.

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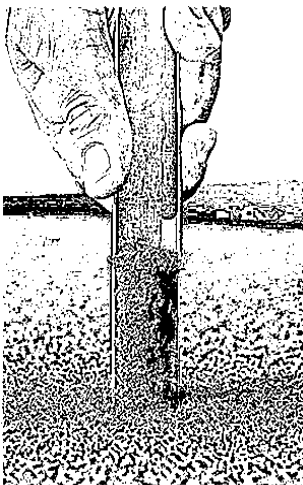
Soil Sampling for the Home Gardener

When was the last time you took a soil sample of your yard or home garden? In order to have healthy, productive plants or a healthy, growing yard, you must first start with fertile, healthy soil. Good soil retains water, releases nutrients, and drains well. It must contain adequate nutrients, optimum pH and organic matter to be healthy and fertile.

As a homeowner, soil sampling is a necessity! With spring arriving quickly, and garden planting and yard maintenance beginning very soon, soil sampling should be on your mind. Soil samples are a very useful tool to help you know how to properly manage your yard or garden. A soil test can provide information on the proper amount of lime and fertilizer to apply as well as indicating whether you have sufficient organic matter in your soil and the nutrient levels in your soil. When gardeners apply only as much lime and fertilizer as is necessary and at the appropriate time, nutrient runoff into surface or ground water is minimized, money is saved, and plant health is optimized. Guessing about how much fertilizer or lime that needs to be applied can threaten and pollute streams, lakes, and wetlands. Soil testing can also be used to diagnose common nutrient deficiencies for plants that are growing poorly.

To take a soil sample, you will need a stainless steel or chrome-plated soil probe, hand garden trowel, shovel, or spade and a bucket or something that you can place the samples in to later mix. You will want to take samples of each unique area that you have- lawn, vegetable garden, flower bed, etc. and sample each of those individually. You will also want to note if your landscape has rolling hills, flat areas, spots with gravel, or areas that you have fertilized in the past. You do not want to take samples all at the top of the hills or in one area of a flat area. You want a diverse sampling of your yard or garden to get the most accurate recommendations. If you plan to submit your samples to the Virginia Tech Soil Testing Laboratory, you will need a Soil Sample Information Sheet and a Soil Sample box.

If you are sampling an established lawn, you want to take a sample of the top 2-4 inches of soil. If you are sampling a vegetable or flower garden, you want to sample the top 6-8 inches of soil, and if there are trees and shrubs you want to sample the top 6 inches of soil. You will want to take multiple samples of each area that you are sampling. You will want to take approximately 10 sub-samples from different locations in your one area to make one comprehensive sample that will represent that whole area. The larger the area, the more sub-samples that are needed. You will want to remove any grass or organic matter from the top of your sample before placing it in your bucket or pail. Once you have your sub-samples, you will want to mix them all together to form your comprehensive sample. In total, you will need enough soil samples to combine together to produce one pint of soil to send to be tested.



After you send your soil samples off to be tested, you will receive your results that will tell you what nutrients are in your soil, recommended amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium to apply, amount of organic matter in your soil, and the pH of your soil. Unless you have problems with your lawn or garden, it is recommended that you soil test every four years.

Soil samples can save you valuable time and money by helping you make the most of your resources. If you have questions or would like more information on soil sampling, you can contact any of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Agents at your local Virginia Cooperative Extension Office.



Carrie Swanson

**Extension Agent,
Agriculture and Natural
Resources
Albemarle County**

I was born and raised in Virginia and have been an Extension Agent in Albemarle County for 12 years. Before that, I spent 2 years working as an Equine Extension Agent for Cornell University in Orange County, NY. I have a bachelor's degree in Animal Science and a Master's in Equine Nutrition, both from Virginia Tech. My focus is on horses and general livestock, pasture and manure management. I'm passionate about providing researched-based information and helping folks achieve their farm and land management goals. In my spare time, I enjoy working on my small farm, where I board horses and raise meat goats. I also help lead an annual 50 mile 4-H trail ride with my Tennessee Walking Horse, Raven.



John G. Thompson

**Extension Agent,
Agriculture and Natural
Resources
Fluvanna County**

I have been an Extension Agent since June, 1999 when I began my career in Mississippi as a 4-H Youth Agent. I worked in Lowndes and then Hinds County, until returning to Virginia in 2005, as 4-H Agent in Fluvanna County. I transferred to the Agriculture role in 2007. I am a native of Nelson County, Virginia. I have a BS in Animal Science and MS in Agricultural Education - both from Virginia Tech. I am married to Jenny and together we have two kids, Amber and Glenn.

My Extension programming has focused recently on Small Ruminants, Beekeeping, Small Farm/Sustainability Issues, and working closely with the Fluvanna Master Gardeners.



Sarah Weaver Sharpe

**Extension Agent,
Agriculture and Natural
Resources
Greene County**

I began my position as the new Ag Agent in Greene County on January 25 and have been settling into life in the Greene County office. I will be housed full time in the Greene County office, but will serve Albemarle, Fluvanna, and Louisa counties as well. My specialty or focus will be on local foods and horticulture.

I grew up on my family's farm in Madison County where we raise pigs, beef cattle, hay, row crops, and have a pick-your-own pumpkin operation. I attended Virginia Tech and received my B.S. in Animal and Poultry Sciences. I have worked for Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District as a Conservation Technician and most recently for Orange County 4-H as a Program Educator. I have a background and experience in the local foods movement, farmers' markets, starting small businesses, and agri-tourism.

I currently live in Louisa County with my husband and our very spoiled beagle, Copper. I am still very actively involved in my family's farm and businesses and involved with my husband's family's beef cattle operation. I am looking forward to working with all of you! Please let me know if I can ever be of help or assistance to you. Also, if you have any ideas for programming needs here in the community, please contact me.



Charles A. Rosson

**Extension Agent,
Agriculture and Natural
Resources
Louisa County**

I have been a lifelong resident and come from a 5th generation family farm in Louisa County. I was very active in 4-H and FFA as a child and showed cattle and hogs regularly through my teen years at fairs all around the country including years ago when the Albemarle County Fair when in was held in Crozet Park. I was raised on a diversified livestock farm that includes Beef Cattle, Sheep, Goats, Hogs and Chickens. I was very active in livestock judging growing up placing nationally in hog judging and cattle.

I started my college education at Iowa State University and received my Bachelor of Science, majoring in Animal Science from VA Tech as well as my Master of Degree. Besides my background in livestock breeding and genetics. I also have a good knowledge of animal nutrition, business planning, estate planning, farm transition, insurance and risk management. I have been with Cooperative Extension since 2003 and previously worked for Virginia Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance for 10 years and Vigortone Ag Products prior to that.

My programming focus includes Beef Cattle Management, Beef Cattle Genetics, facility design, pasture management and nutrition.

Local Food Hub Workshops

Production walks throughout the season at Bellair Farm, plus many other topics at various locations throughout Charlottesville, including: Organic Certification, Pest Management, Honeybee Colony Management, Choosing and Managing Cover Crops, Produce Safety Alliance Training, Evaluating Market Opportunities for Your Farm, and more! See their website for more info:

<http://www.localfoodhub.org/workshops/>

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Why DID the CHICKEN cross the road?

It was running for its life! For those of you who own and raise chickens, you understand one of a dozen predators was probably after it! Why is this important? More and more people want to raise poultry for eggs and the life experience it can provide our family. This is also the time of year that “chick days” are going on at local stores, so lots of families are jumping into poultry right now. One of the single biggest problems with that life experience is the death part. EVERYTHING likes to eat chickens. There are exceptions to that statement...but not many!

There is also more to raising birds than security from predators. Things like feed and water, health, nest boxes, and understanding seasonality of egg production. We'll touch on much of that here, but keep in mind, if we can't keep the birds safe, we won't be getting eggs. So we will talk about housing first. Birds raised in a floor pen need 2 square feet of space per bird. If allowed access to an outside run, each bird should have 5-10 square feet per bird. Provide 3 inches of feeder space per bird. To minimize wasted feed, the lip of the feeder should be level with the height of the birds' back, and trough feeders should be kept less than half full. Fresh, adequate water should be supplied daily. Provide 1 inch of waterer space per bird. Clean waterers 3-4 times per week. Also provide 6 inches of roost space for each bird. Place roosts 24 inches above the floor and provide a 10x10 inch nest for every 4-5 hens. Nests should be 24 inches off the floor away from the roosts. Keep nesting materials clean and dry. Collect eggs twice daily. You may also place a wooden egg in the nest to encourage the hens to use the nest.

What should you feed your birds? A completely balanced ration. Avoid table scraps and whole grain, as they dilute nutrient intake and thus lower production. After birds are 20 weeks of age, feed them a 15- to 18-percent protein layer ration, and feed grit and oyster shells in separate feeders. More directions for younger birds are available from [VCE Publication 2902-1099, A Small Scale Agriculture Alternative: Poultry.](#)

Which breed should I select? That depends on your objectives. Do you want brown eggs or white? Layers or meat birds? Home use only, or do you plan to sell eggs? There are lots of poultry owners who can provide their opinions on different breeds. Several feed stores in our region are selling chicks, and on the rare occasion they might be selling pullets as well. Those outlets can also help educate you on which breed would most closely match your goals. Generally speaking, sex linked hybrids, Rhode Island Reds, and New Hampshire breeds tend to have a meaty carcass **and** produce a good supply of eggs. Hybrids that lay brown eggs also tend to be more docile than those that lay white eggs.

Why have my birds quit laying? For maximum production, birds need 14-16 hours of sunlight each day. They need proper nutrition, and a low stress environment. They also stop laying when they molt. Stress can come from roosters, hens harassing each other, dogs, and predators/wildlife. Keeping your flock healthy and disease free is also paramount to good production! Make sure any birds that come into the flock come from a reputable source, have been vaccinated against Marek's disease, and are U.S. Pullorum-Typhoid Clean.

There is a lot more to raising poultry than what was briefly covered here. Publications are available through the VCE website at www.ext.vt.edu, by searching Poultry.

Good luck, and as always, if you have a question, call us!



Upcoming Events

Thursday, March 31st

[Virginia Agribusiness Council Connections Receptions & Dinners](#)

Graves Mountain Lodge, Syria, VA

<http://www.va-agribusiness.org/councilconnections>



Thursday, April 7th

[Growing Produce for Direct Marketing](#)

Albemarle County Office Building South, 1600 5th Street Extended, F/R Training Room, Charlottesville, \$5 Registration Fee payable at Event (Cash or Check Only)

1-4 pm: Basics of Vegetable Production for Direct Marketing (including Site Selection, Harvesting, Marketing, Niche Products and more)

4-6 pm: Enhancing the Safety of Locally Grown Produce - a certification program for you to learn food safety techniques and best management practices to help keep you and your customers safe.

To register or for more information, call the Greene County Extension Office at (434)985-5236

or e-mail Sarah Sharpe at seweaver@vt.edu



Thursday, April 14th

[Virginia Forage and Grassland Council – Spring Forage and Grazing Field Day](#)

Swallow Hill Farm in Caroline County, Virginia

<http://vaforages.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/April-14-Field-Day-Flyer.pdf>



Thursday, April 28th

[Aquaculture Cage Building Workshop – Randolph Farm, Virginia State University](#)

workshop will teach pond owners how to pond cages for growing fish in ponds for fun or profit. Growing Catfish in cages will be emphasized.

For more info or to register, contact: David Crosby dcrosby@vsu.edu (804)524-5620



Tuesday, May 24th

[Virginia Agribusiness Council Connections Receptions & Dinners](#)

Cross Keys Barn, Harrisonburg, VA

<http://www.va-agribusiness.org/councilconnections>



Monday, May 2nd

[Well Water Testing](#)

Albemarle County Kick-off Meeting - for more info:

<http://offices.ext.vt.edu/albemarle/whats-new/water-clinic-flyer.pdf> or nancyb63@vt.edu (434) 872-4580

Fluvanna County Kick-off Meeting – for more info:

<http://offices.ext.vt.edu/fluvanna/whats-new/water-quality-flyer.pdf> or davise06@vt.edu (434) 591-1950



Tuesday, May 3rd

[Conservation Field Day](#)

Modesto Farm and Greenhouse, 952 Rolling Road South, Scottsville VA 24590; 4:00 - 8:00 p.m.; \$10.00 a person; for more info:

<http://offices.ext.vt.edu/fluvanna/whats-new/conservation-fd-flyer.pdf> or davise06@vt.edu (434) 591-1950



Tuesday, October 11th

[Pesticide Disposal Program](#)

Ivy Materials Utilization Center (Old Ivy Landfill)

Contact Carrie Swanson for more information: cswanson@vt.edu (434) 872-4580