

Overview

Taking samples for Microbe Labs microbiology tests is much the same as taking samples for nutrient and other types of tests in that the aim is to obtain representative samples that, once analysed, tell you what you want to know. You should also decide whether you want to test broadly across a wide area (general sampling) or investigate specific areas, such as soil types, 'problem zones', areas with different fertiliser, crop rotation or soil biology treatments (specific sampling). The information below will help you to follow a sampling pattern and to decide whether you want to undertake general or specific testing. Information on what and how much you need to sample is also provided, along with a general description of each test, what it is used for, and examples of why you may want to use it.

One difference between soil and microbiology samples is that in most cases **microbiology samples need to be kept cold or in most cases frozen (not roots)** as soon as possible after sampling (see How to Prepare Samples, page 6).

Labelling

Work out in advance how you are going to identify your samples (for example, by paddock name, soil type, variety, etc.) and stick to it. Remember to label every container with your name and sample identification. This is the only way you will know which results belong to which sample.

When is the best time to sample?

Use Table 1, opposite, to work out the best time to sample. You can sample at any time, depending on what 'question' you are asking. Otherwise, the best times to sample for each type of test are shown in Table 1. Try to avoid weather extremes (for example, very hot, cold or wet). Try to sample on a Monday so that the samples will arrive at the laboratory the same week. If you intend to sample periodically over time try to sample at regular intervals (e.g., the same time each year) and for samples that are best taken during the growth of crops try to sample at the same growth stage each time.

How much material do you need?

Use Table 2, opposite, to work out how much material you need to sample.