



City of Austin
Brownfields Revitalization Office

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FREE Soil Testing for Gardeners
Visit the Soil Kitchen during this year's Fusebox Festival.

AUSTIN, Texas— As the temperatures in Austin warm, home gardeners begin to think about the many varieties of crops they'll want to plant this spring. First, however, they'll need to put some thought into the quality of their garden's soil. Austin Brownfields Revitalization Office, part of Austin Resource Recovery, is making this process easy by sponsoring free soil testing at the **Soil Kitchen**. The Kitchen will be open during part of this year's Fusebox Festival, on April 10-12 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., at 1098 Jain Lane in East Austin. Representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension Service and the City of Austin will be on hand to test soil for the presence of heavy metals and soil nutrients.

“Soil testing is an important start for preparing garden beds before planting. Understanding what is actually in the soil provides gardeners with the information they need to successfully grow healthy crops for their families,” said Christine Whitney, program manager for Brownfields Revitalization Office.

With technical support from the Environmental Protection Agency, gardeners can bring in samples for sophisticated testing in the EPA's mobile lab at no charge. “Historical uses of land, even for residential use, may have left behind heavy metals. The Soil Kitchen provides an opportunity to inform gardeners of what's in their soil and what can be done to improve soil quality and food safety,” Whitney said. The testing is confidential. Gardeners simply list their initials, date of soil collection and the closest intersection on their quart size sample bags. A number is assigned to the sample and the gardener can look up the number online, contact the Brownfields Office by phone or

drop back by the Soil Kitchen to obtain the results later. A test will generally take about 30 minutes, but the length of time depends on how many samples have already been dropped off.

Gardeners can also watch demonstrations on how to build raised beds and learn about home composting during the festival. Additionally, staff members from the City's Office of Sustainability and Parks and Recreation's Sustainable Urban Agriculture program will be on hand to encourage gardeners and answer any questions they may have about their gardens and plant life.

For more information about the Soil Kitchen and soil sampling, please visit:

www.austintexas.gov/soilkitchen.

Directions for Soil Sampling:

1. Gather together a garden trowel or spade; a spoon; two zip-top, quart size, plastic bags; a waterproof marker; and a clean shallow pan.
2. Label the bag(s) with the following information: your initials, the date you took your sample and the approximate location of your garden plot. PLEASE **do not give your exact address**. Instead, please list your street and the closest cross street. This is for the protection of your privacy.
3. Go to your garden area and sample the soil in five to 10 different spots around the garden bed(s). Sample to a depth of six inches, using your trowel to make a cone shape into the soil and then extract the samples. Place each of the collected samples into the shallow pan.
4. When you have completed the sampling work, take your spoon and mix all the soil together in the shallow pan to obtain a more representative sample.
5. If the soil is very wet, leave the soil to dry out in the pan overnight. Make sure to remove any rocks, grass or dead plant material that could get in the way.
6. If you would like to have your soil sampled for the presence of heavy metals AND for soil nutrients, please use the collected soil to half-fill TWO separate zip-top bags.
7. Fill your plastic bag(s) until it is half -full and seal it shut.



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8. Drop your sample off at the Soil Kitchen. The soil nutrient information may be obtained while you wait. The heavy metals analysis may take a bit longer. We will give you a card that has information on how to obtain your soil results online.

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