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**Users urged to submit soil sample information online**RALEIGH — The N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is reminding growers and gardeners to get a head start on their planting projects by submitting soil samples now. There is no fee currently, and reports are available in one to two weeks. Also, sample information forms can now be completed and submitted online for more accurate and efficient processing.“As the weather warms up, homeowners start focusing more on yard and garden maintenance and landscaping projects, which could benefit from soil sampling and agronomic advice,” said Jagathi Kamalakanthan, NCDA&CS soil testing agronomist. “Submitting samples during the off-peak times ensures faster turnaround times and no fees for this service. Plus, you will have the information in plenty of time to put fall gardening plans and yard or pasture renovations in place.” The peak season for submitting soil samples is December through March, when a $4 fee is charged per sample. Off-season times are April through November, when no fees are charged.Many home gardeners drop off their soil samples along with a hand-written sample information form at the nearest county Cooperative Extension office. The new online procedure requires a little forethought but is worth the effort. Before going to the extension office, clients should visit the Agronomic Services Division’s Public-Access Laboratory Information Management System website at [www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/pals](http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/pals), create a user account, and respond to a verification email. Then, they can fill out and submit their sample information form online. A copy of the electronic form should be sent along with the samples to the soil lab as usual.There are several good reasons to establish a PALS account. It is a great way for the grower or home owner to take charge of the accuracy of their information. Clients can directly enter, update and correct their name, address and other details. This procedure reduces errors and duplications that invariably occur when staff must key in data from handwritten forms.“Once an account is created, online submission is also a great time saver,” Kamalakanthan said. “For all future submissions, the client’s information is automatically filled in.”Another advantage of having a PALS account is that clients are always notified by email when their report is completed and posted online. Every account is associated with a verified email address.Although the agency prefers that clients set up an account, having one is not necessary to search for reports online or to submit samples with a hand-written form. However, if clients do not put a valid email address on the sample information form, they will not receive notification when their report becomes available online. The division does not routinely mail soil test reports.Step-by-step instructions on how to create a PALS account, submit soil sample information online, and search for reports are available online at [www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/](http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/).-cs-2,4 |

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