

THE DIRT ON FREE SOIL TESTING



By Eric Todderud

What treasures are buried in your garden soil? Magnesium? Calcium? Potassium? A free program allows you to find out.

King Conservation District offers free soil testing to residents of Seattle and most of King County. Eligible residents can test up to five samples of garden soil without cost. An independent laboratory conducts testing; the results are usually provided within a few weeks.

The tests identify basic soil components that are crucial to garden success.

Easy-to-read graphs show levels of key nutrients, such as nitrogen, phosphorus, magnesium and calcium. The results also identify soil pH and other measures of soil health.

Testing is simple. Dig up three pounds of soil for each sample and deliver or ship it to the King Conservation District.

When you receive your soil report, you will get not only a detailed breakdown of the levels of various soil components, but the report also includes detailed explanations, in lay-person's terminology, of what the results mean, and how to use those results to improve your soil.

Test results for two samples from my P-Patch garden showed lots of phosphorus (which I'm told is normal for this part of the country) but a serious lack of nitrogen. My friends at the local organic fertilizer store hooked me up with a healthy dose of bat guano, and I hope that will improve my yields this year.

Best of all, I can test again after the growing season to see if my efforts paid off and my soil is healthier.



By Robert Grubbs

I wrote this piece in 2019 when UpGarden was being evicted, but I think it speaks to the need for all P-Patches.

I went to the garden to clear my head after spending much of the morning trying to figure out how to address our pending eviction. The blue sky and sunshine were a welcome change from the rain and wind that we had been slogging through for the past several days - or was it weeks?

No one else was there, and I was relishing the solitude, going about the work of locating and re-baiting a few rat traps. And then I noticed a woman slowly walking along one of the wide aisles, stopping to look carefully at this flower, then another.

We made eye contact, nodded, and both went about our business. I had never seen her in the garden before, but she was clearly enjoying an afternoon stroll - much as I was just being there.

Meanwhile, I had located a rat burrow and went to the trailer to get a shovel to "explore" it. The woman had continued her stroll and was now close enough that I greeted her, and we began to talk.

Her accent was European, and she was a bit older than I. We exchanged the usual pleasantries, and then she mentioned that she lived nearby and often came up to enjoy the garden.

I told her how glad I was to hear that, but that we had just learned about our pending eviction, so to enjoy it while she could. She

said then that she was shocked to hear this and wanted to know what she could do. I told her that we were still trying to determine what to do, but to keep her eyes open for a petition to sign or some other way to lend her support, which she said she would be happy to do.

I then introduced myself and learned that her name was Ingrid. I look forward to seeing and talking with her again.

The point of this too lengthy story is that I would have never met this woman if the UpGarden did not exist.

I likely would have never met any of my fellow UpGardeners either because the nature of living in a city in multi-family buildings, as many of us do, is to keep to ourselves, nod an acknowledgment, and keep moving.

In a less dense environment, we might have backyards to share with neighbors that we would get to know, but in UpTown/Lower Queen Anne, almost no one has these. And there is no neighborhood park for children to play in or dogs to romp in.

If the UpGarden ceased to exist, we could point to the loss of produce donated to food banks and the loss of gratification that comes from planting and nurturing our vegetables and flowers, but to me, the biggest loss would be this loss of community and human interaction that being in the garden has afforded me.