

Community Gardens Soil Testing Program 2026 Program Rules

Soil testing supports the growth and expansion of community and home gardens by protecting the health and safety of the food produced in these gardens. In partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest NY, the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets (AGM), and the Cornell Soil Health Lab, eligible, food-producing community and home gardens in New York State can receive a comprehensive soil test for no charge. The soil test will analyze samples for heavy metal and nutrient levels. Technical support and education for participating growers will be provided by the Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest New York team.

A soil test will be made available to eligible applicants in order of receipt of complete application, until funding is exhausted.

Shipping costs associated with sending soil samples to the Cornell Soil Health Lab will also be covered under this funding. The Harvest NY team can work with the grower for this part of the process. Please contact the Harvest NY specialist in your area or the program coordinator for more information (See application for contact emails).

Eligibility and Application Process

Eligible applicants include food-producing gardens in New York State.

All community and home gardeners who grow food and share the harvest with their community at no cost are encouraged to apply.

All applicants must provide the following proof of eligibility to both components of the following criteria:

Attestation that the garden is a food-producing garden & that the food grown in the garden is shared with community members at no cost (application checkbox required).

Applications will be accepted until funding is exhausted.

Applications can be downloaded from the AGM Community Gardens webpage at <https://agriculture.ny.gov/community-gardens> or the Harvest NY webpage at <https://harvestny.cce.cornell.edu/urban-agriculture.php>.

All interested applicants must email the completed PDF application to: [Mallory Hohl](mailto:Mallory.Hohl), program coordinator, with the subject '2026 Community Gardens Soil Testing Program Application'.

Questions regarding this program should be submitted to: Mallory Hohl at mdh286@cornell.edu.

Program Participation

The Program Coordinator team will send the following information to approved applicants via email:

1. An acceptance email, including *Confirmation Number* to be included on the required 'Community Gardens Soil Testing Program Submission Form'.
2. Necessary and helpful forms, including the 'Community Gardens Soil Testing Program Submission Form', 'Soil Sampling Guidance' document, and more.

Growers will be responsible for collecting the soil sample and sending the sample to the Cornell Soil Health Lab, however, support is available on an as-needed basis. Please reach out to the Harvest NY team for assistance with collecting the soil sample and/or shipment. 'Shipping kits' (shipping box, bags, label, prepaid shipping label) are available upon request.

Samples will be digested to obtain total amounts of heavy metal elements, reported in milligrams of element per kilogram of soil (ppm). Testing will also provide growers with nutrient levels (in pounds per acre), soil pH, and percent organic matter (%OM).

Processing times may vary depending on shipping services and lab capacity. Test results are returned via email in approximately 6-8 weeks.

Technical support for participating growers will be provided by the Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest New York team. These specialists will offer interpretation on test results and share site-specific Best Management Practices.

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and Cornell University assume no liability resulting from the use of the testing laboratory recommendations or responsibility financial or otherwise for any further action required to address any specific condition found at the site at which the testing sample was taken.

By participating in the 2026 Community Gardens Soil Testing Program, applicants are authorizing the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to share their contact information and soil data with Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest NY.