

## What's the Latest Dirt on The Grounds Guys?

Dirt is really something that is swept, and soil is how we make our living. Discussing soil may seem odd, but if the client asked how to improve their plant growth knowing a little about texture, drainage and microbes will help answer their questions.

One tool that is a favorite of mine is a 36" soil probe available through A&M Leonard. The probe is simply pushed in to the ground and pulled out to reveal the soil profile. There is a lot of information from this soil sample that will tell you the health of the soil, and root system if pulled in turf areas.

What do you learn from this simple but amazing tool? A small sampling will tell the soil moisture and how far it is available for the plant roots for starters. The depth of good top soil is seen with the sample, and if rock or thatch is present. Darker soils tend to be richer in nutrients, however, black soil that is wet and smells of sulfur is saturated with water. These signs of good or bad soil will help you make educated decisions to provide the best plant medium for your clients.

The soil probe can also determine if grubs are a problem. Although it is not specifically designed to detect pests, it has proven reliable in finding grubs for me. If a grub is removed with a soil probe you should dig a piece of sod one square foot and count how many grubs are present. One grub is not something that demands chemical application, however four to six of them and a maintenance plan with preventing these damaging pests in the future is wise.

Thatch was mentioned earlier but do you know what constitutes a change in the maintenance for your client? According to Penn State Extension, "Thatch is a loose, intermingled organic layer of dead and living shoots, stems, and roots that develops between the zone of green vegetation and the soil surface." It is somewhat like shedding hair for humans and is a natural process for the health of the turf. Thatch becomes a problem when more than ½ inch is present because it prevents proper air circulation, drainage and the overall health of the turf and soil. Microbes break down thatch and it helps keep everything in balance with nature, however, when it becomes too thick the microbial action in the soil cannot take care of it, and it builds to an unhealthy layer. Only a soil probe can give you a visible picture of how much thatch is present.

Texture is how soil feels when you touch it. Is it smooth like clay or slightly rough on your fingers like sand? Does it fly away easily in the wind like silt? The combination of those three types of soil creates the soil profile. Feeling the soil and knowing the amount of sand, silt and clay takes practice, but using a soil probe can show you the different layers and how thick they are in the ground. I use the soil probe and share this information and sample of their soil. They can see for themselves if it is healthy or needs something extra. They are always intrigued with this process and appreciate the education that is provided for their individual soil sample. Usually they want several samples and with every pull you could further educate and add services to help improve their soil health!

Call Shelly Campbell with A&M Leonard and order a soil probe. These are several lengths in stock, and now you know how to use this awesome tool properly. This is another way that The Grounds Guys are setting the standard for better maintenance and building relationships with our clients!

