**Dakota Farm Talk – Spring Garden Preparation with NRCS Rachel Frei**

**Pam Geppert**

With snow still piled up in many areas, the growing season may seem far off, but gardeners might use the last days of winter to consider their soils. Natural Resources Conservation Service urban conservationist Rachel Frei explains soil is truly where all life begins.

**Rachel Frei**

I kind of think about soil in the same way that I would think about a body and that we need preventative health care. We need a little checkup every now and then. So when it comes to starting your garden, the first thing I recommend doing is taking a soil test.

**Pam Geppert**

Soil is a living organism full of life. Sampling reveals the health and nutrient value of soil and can steer gardeners to delivering any help soils might need. Soil testing can wait until snow is melted and soils begin to dry. Frei advises collecting soil from several 0 to 6 inch deep samples, mixing together and then sending a few cups to a lab for analysis.

Most NRC locations can assist with finding a soil lab and then interpreting the results. Frei explains nutrients that might be needed from fertilizers are like vitamins to the plant.

**Rachel Frei**

With that information, you might decide, I need to put a little bit of nitrogen with my tomato plant, or I might need to do a little mulching with some straw. So it gives you a really comprehensive overview of what you want to do to your soils to help improve what you're trying to grow.

**Pam Geppert**

Soil testing aids gardeners in applying the proper amount of fertilizer, avoiding over application, which is costly and potentially harmful to natural resources. Visit the NRCS at any USDA Service Center to learn more on soil health and sampling for the lawn and garden. I'm Pam Geppert reporting for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Helping people Help the land.