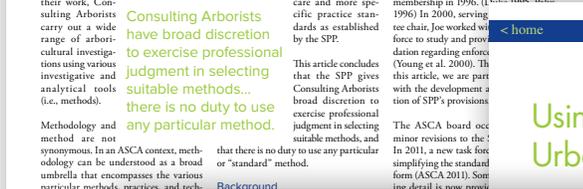


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An Evaluation of Plant Root Simulator Probes in an Arid Environment

By Douglas J. Merkle, Resource Soil Scientist, USDA-NRCS

Proper soil fertility can often be the key to the long-term success of plantings. Most of what we know about ion uptake by plant roots is derived from studies using hydroponic methods of plant culture. In the real world, plants experience very different conditions. Soils are notoriously heterogeneous in terms of both their chemistry and physics.

Extreme soil types, the so-called problem soils, are those that limit plant growth by deficiencies or excesses of various elements. In addition, variations in pH may exert potent indirect effects on the availabilities of essential nutrients, as well as directly impacting root growth and leading to concentra-

simulator (PRS) probes manufactured by (WAI) Western Ag Innovations of Saskatchewan, Canada. WAI markets this type of ion-exchange resin membrane. The results summarized here were published by Drohan, et al., *Soil Sci. Soc. Am. J.* 69:1482–1491 (2005).

Some of the reasons for the probes' popularity are their ease of use, their reported ability to provide a reliable measure of nutrient availability over a variety of soil conditions, their ability to extract a diverse suite of elements from the soil at once, and their affordability and speed of analysis. Compared with chemical-based extractions, ions measured with resins are thought to be a better index of relative plant nutrient

Figure 2. PRS probes in place on the Virgin River floodplain, in the soil profile.



Anion probes (orange) have a positively charged membrane to simultaneously attract and adsorb all negatively charged anions, such as nitrate (NO₃⁻), phosphate (H₂PO₄⁻, HPO₄²⁻), and sulfate (SO₄²⁻).

Measuring a tree trunk.

Inventory of palm trees.

Documentation regarding enforcement of the SPP (Young et al. 2000). In this article, we are part with the development and enforcement of SPP's provisions.

The ASCA board occasionally makes minor revisions to the SPP. In 2011, a new task force was formed to simplify the standard form (ASCA 2011). Some of the details are now revised.

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