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Fundamentals of Soil Science

4.8. Nutrient Availability and *pH* Relationships

Most of the nutrients exist in mineral and organic matter and as such are insoluble and unavailable to plants. Nutrients become available through mineral weathering and organic matter decomposition. It is a rare soil, indeed, that is capable of supplying all of the essential elements for long periods of time in quantities needed to produce high yield.

The nutrients are absorbed from the soil solution or from colloid surfaces as cations and anions. Cations are positively charged; anions are negatively charged. Thirteen essential elements and the forms in which they are commonly absorbed by plant roots are given in Table 1.

The particular *pH* measured in a soil is caused by a particular set of chemical conditions. Therefore, a determination of soil *pH* is one of the most important tests that can be made

pH

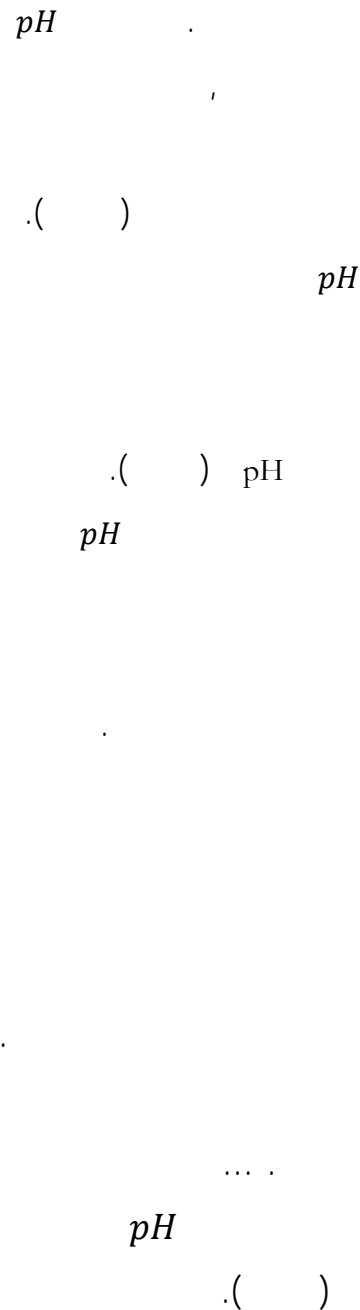
pH

to diagnose plant growth problems. For example, suppose some diseased plants have light green leaves that could be caused by several factors. If the *pH* of the soil is as low as 5.5 or less, the disease is probably not an iron deficiency, since iron compounds are soluble under acid conditions (Figure 1). If the soil *pH* is 8, one should seriously consider the possibility of iron deficiency because iron compounds are very insoluble in soils with *pH* of 8 (Figure 1).

As an analogy, the *pH* of the soil is like the temperature of an animal. Both tests are easily made and provide basic information useful in diagnosing what is likely to be disease or problem.

4.9. Effect of *pH* on Soil Organisms

The capacity of fungi to thrive in highly acid soils is greater than bacteria. ... High soil acidity has been shown to inhabit earthworms in soils. ... The availability of nitrogen in soils is related mainly to the effect of *pH* on decomposition of organic matter (Figure 1).



References

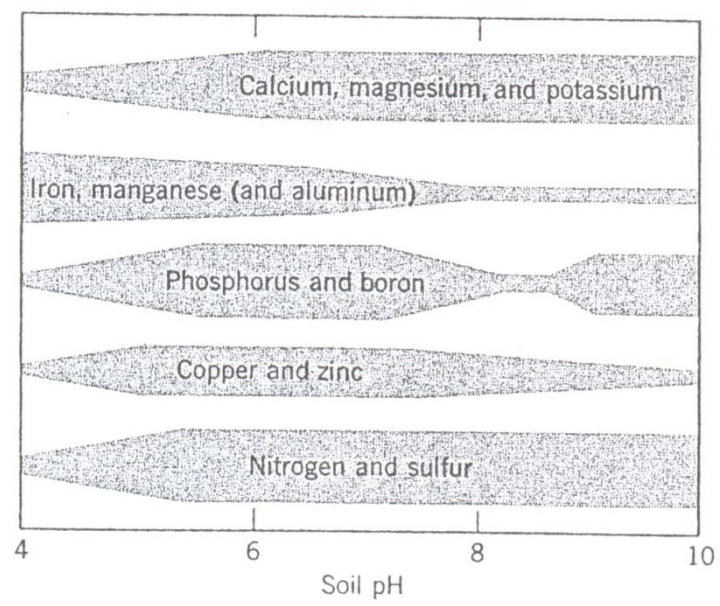
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Soil Science. John Wiley & Sons,
New York, USA

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NO_3^- , NH_4^+
 $H_2PO_4^-$, HPO_4^{-2}
 K^+
 Ca^{+2}
 Mg^{+2}
 SO_4^{-2}

Mn^{+2}
 Fe^{+2}
 BO_3^{-3}
 Zn^{+2}
 Cu^{+2}
 MoO_4^{-2}
 Cl^-



: pH

.(Foth, 1978)

