“A Soil and Plant Fertility Product”

Improves Soil Fertility; Promotes Conservation and Sustainable Agriculture
Progyp Promotes Soil and Plant Fertility and Sustainable Agriculture

Progyp is a fertilizer product that provides vital nutrients, improves soil fertility properties, and promotes sustainable agriculture. Soil fertility is the result of a number of different soil factors and processes working together. These relate to the physical, chemical and biological components that make up the soil.

Progyp is uniquely equipped to deliver highly available nutrients and enhance the physical and chemical properties of soil resulting in improved soils and crop performance.

Soils are dynamic, complex systems of inorganic, organic and biotic components that have the capacity to support plant life. Soils are classified on the basis of their chemical and physical properties. These properties include texture, structure, color and the nature and properties of soil horizons.

Key Concepts

- Soils are dynamic systems composed of organic, inorganic and living components.
- Soils are classified according to measurable and observable properties.
- Key physical characteristics of soils are texture, bulk density and porosity, all of which influence nutrient and water dynamics in the soil.
- Key chemical properties of soils include acidity (pH), cation exchange capacity (CEC), base saturation, organic matter content and nutrient availability.
- Soils are a slowly renewable natural resource that is being degraded worldwide due to erosion, desertification, salinization and overuse.
- Understanding, interpreting and managing soil properties can result in improved soils, more efficient nutrient utilization, improved crop performance and promotes conservation, land stewardship and sustainable agriculture practices.
A. Reviewing Soil Composition and Profile

What are soils made of?

The ideal soil contains 25% air, 25% water, 45% minerals as sand, silt and clay, and 5% organic matter. A soil with this composition would be easy to cultivate, stable, fertile and capable of supporting a diverse range of plant and microbial life.

It’s important to know what type of soil you’re dealing with in order to ensure the most accurate results possible. The following information will help you determine what type of soil you have.

An easy way to help determine what type of soil you have is to simply feel it to determine texture and thus what the primary makeup of the soil is. Grab a baseball size portion of the soil in your hands and wet the soil with water, working the moist soil with your hands. The stickier it is, the more clay there is. The soapier the soil feels the higher the silt content. Grittiness is indicative of sand.

The soil texture triangle shows the 12 major soil texture classes and what percent of each type soil makes them up. The type of soil with the best overall properties is loamy soil. It contains a balance of all three soil materials—silt, sand and clay—plus humus. Loam is dark in color and is mealy—soft, dry and crumbly—in your hands. It has a tight hold on water and plant food but it drains well, and air moves freely between soil particles down to the roots. The feel test for loam yields a smooth, partly gritty, partly sticky ball that crumbles easily.

What is soil profile?

A soil profile is a vertical section through the soil that extends to or into less weathered parent material. Soil profiles are divided into horizons. Each horizon is a layer within the soil profile that has distinct characteristics, such as color, texture or structure; that differ from the layer above or below it.

As soil develops, it forms layers. The layered structure is called a soil profile, and each layer is a soil horizon. The top layer, called the O horizon, is a thin layer of mostly dead plant matter. Under it is a layer rich in humus and minerals, called the A horizon. The A and O horizons together are also called topsoil.

Under the topsoil, there is often a zone of leaching. As rainwater percolates through the soil, it washes down material from the layers above - dissolved calcite, iron oxides (gives soil color), clay minerals, products of humus decay - leaving behind pale sandy material. The B horizon is where all the stuff leached from above ends up. Also called the zone of accumulation, it’s a place that tends to be clayey. It’s a place where clays can compact to the point of making a layer impermeable to water, called hardpan. Acids and salts can also accumulate in the B horizon, which reduce plant growth.

The C horizon is a zone filled with large chunks of parent rock in the process of weathering. This zone is just above the R horizon, or bedrock.
B. Two Soil Properties that Influence Soil Fertility and Plant Growth

1. Physical, or the texture and structure of the soil

What is soil structure?

Soil structure has a major influence on soil behavior. A ‘well structured’ soil has plenty of living spaces, storage spaces, doorways, and passages (for utilization by water, gases, nutrients, roots and a vast array of organisms). Only about 50% of soil is solid material. The remainder is pore space. It is in these spaces that the action happens. Soil structure is the arrangement of pores and fissures (porosity) within a matrix of solid materials (soil particles and organic matter). The solid materials bond and aggregate to give the pores and fissures. The quantity, distribution and arrangement of pores determines water holding capacity, infiltration, permeability, root penetration, and respiration.

The diagram demonstrates how solids and pores might arrange in soil to give a porosity of 50%. Small pores within the aggregates provide storage and refuge. The larger pores (and fissures) between the aggregates are the pathways for liquids, gases, roots and organisms.

What types of soil structure are there?

Soil material fits and binds together in many different ways. With some, the bonding is very weak, in others very strong. With some, the size of aggregates is very fine, in others coarse and large. With some the aggregates are dense containing few pores, in others quite open with plenty of pores.

Six Broad Categories of Soil Structure

1. Granular (high permeability)
2. Aggregated (high permeability)
3. Blocky (moderate permeability)
4. Columnar/prismatic (moderate permeability)
5. Platey (low permeability)
6. Massive (low permeability)

Why is soil structure so important?

Soil is like a city. The structure and layout of both determine how things happen, the rate at which they happen, and the capability to keep them happening. The following characteristics are used to help evaluate the ability of any soil to perform well (or otherwise):

- Porosity (to represent aeration, water storage capacity, plant wilting point and drainage)
- Permeability (to represent infiltration, drainage and respiration)
- Bonding and aggregation (to represent how the solids group together and the construction materials used)
- Soil strength (to represent toughness and resilience of structures)
- Friability, tillage and trafficability (to represent how soils behave with mechanical disturbance)
What are the chemical properties of soils that are important to plant growth?

- Nutrient availability and cation exchange capacity, which affect the soil’s inherent fertility and its ability to hold nutrients.
- The chemical characteristics of the soil solution, which affect pH and salinity.
- The sodicity of the soil, which affects soil stability.

What is nutrient availability and cation exchange capacity?

Nutrients become available to plants as minerals in the soil solution, or once released from soil reserves by root acids and microbial enzymes. Soluble nutrients can move to the root zone as plants take in water. In the soil, the larger portion of plant nutrients is bound up in complex compounds that are unavailable to plants. The smaller portion is in simpler, more soluble forms, which are useable by plants. The complex compounds are gradually changed into the simpler compounds by chemical weathering. Thus, the fertility of a soil depends in part on how easily
the complex compounds can be changed to the simpler forms. This is referred to as the availability of a nutrient. Plant nutrients are composed of single elements (for example, phosphorus (P)) or compounds of elements (for example, ammonium nitrate (NH₄NO₃)). In either case, the nutrients are all composed of atoms.

Most of the soil nutrients that a plant takes up must be in a soluble form (in other words, mixed with water). When an atom is in water, it usually becomes electrically charged and is called an ion. An ion with a positive electrical charge is called a cation. An ion with a negative electrical charge is called an anion. Cations include sodium (Na+), potassium (K+), calcium (Ca++) and aluminium (Al+++). Anions include chloride (Cl–), nitrate (NO₃–), sulfate (SO₄–), carbonate (CO₃–) and borate (BO₂–). One plus or one minus sign means an ion has one positive or negative electrical charge. Two or more plus or minus signs means an ion has two or more positive or negative charges. More positive charges mean an increasing ability to bond with a negatively charged surface. More negative charges mean an increasing ability to bond with a positively charged surface.

The cations and anions can be:
- Absorbed (taken up) by plant roots
- Leached from the soil via the soil water
- Adsorbed (attached) to the surfaces of negatively and positively charged soil particles

The soil’s capacity to adsorb nutrients in the form of cations is called its cation exchange capacity (CEC). Cation exchange capacity is measured by a soil test. The cations are held on the surface of soil minerals and organic matter and within the crystalline framework of some clay minerals. The greater the particle surface area available to adsorb cations the higher the soil’s fertility.

Thus, soil texture has an effect on soil fertility because of the sizes of the particles that make up the various soil texture classes; and so does the amount of organic matter. Soils with a high clay or organic matter content provide a much greater surface area for cations to adsorb onto. As long as the nutrient cations and anions are adsorbed onto the soil particles, they cannot be absorbed by plants or leached from the soil. However, they are not held too tightly and can be exchanged with other ions of a like charge that are in the soil solution. Once the nutrients are in the soil solution, they can be absorbed by the plant’s roots or lost to leaching.

In order to release a cation held on an exchange site, some other material must first dislodge or replace it. This is known as Cation Exchange. Plants roots produce organic acids, or exudates, which act as a lubricant for the root, a food source for microbes and provide hydrogen ions. This hydrogen is used to drive the cation exchange process; both plants and microbes employ the technique of cation exchange to release nutrients from the soil. It has been estimated that up to 95% of a plant’s mineral nutrition goes through the exchange process.

The relative amount of each nutrient on the exchange sites is measured to determine base saturation. This term is used to indicate nutrient balance and the effects of each element on the exchange process. When any one element dominates the exchange sites, nutrient
imbalances, antagonistic lock-up and genuine deficiencies can occur. The ratio of one element to another is far more important than levels of available or total nutrients.

Cation exchange and base saturation also determine the pH of the soil, and should always be measured before any form of fertilizer or lime is applied. Cation exchange provides a convenient means of storing nutrients as they are released from soil reserves, before they are needed by the plant. Without this, available nutrients would be washed away. The exchange process also gives plants a means of controlling nutrient uptake, via root exudates and beneficial microbes, creating a supply-and-demand situation.

**What are the chemical characteristics of the soil solution, which affect pH and salinity?**

Soil water is the water (H₂O) held within the soil pores. Soil solution is the soil water together with its dissolved salts (cations and anions). The soil solution is the medium by which most soil nutrients are supplied to growing plants. It also has a role in soil salinity and pH.

**Soil salinity** - an increased concentration of salts in the soil solution. In general, as soil moisture is reduced, especially by evaporation, the concentration of soluble salts of sodium, calcium, magnesium, and potassium in the soil solution increases. These salts may already be present in the soil solution or they can be carried upward from the ground water by capillary action if the water table rises.

The concentration of soluble salts can become so high as to interfere with the growth of plants. Soils that have a salt concentration in the surface soil that is sufficient to interfere seriously with the growth of plants are called saline soils. Salinity can occur on dryland farms and on irrigated farms. The salinity that occurs is the same in either case, only the initiating causes and management methods may be different and is measured in soil tests.

**Soil pH** - the soil solution can be neutral, acid, or alkaline. This is called the soil pH. The pH measures the concentration of positively charged hydrogen ions (H⁺) in the soil solution on a logarithmic scale ranging from 0 to 14. When a soil solution contains more H⁺ ions, it is acidic. When there are fewer H⁺ ions, the soil solution is alkaline. The level of acidity or alkalinity in a soil affects the availability of soil nutrients.

**What is the sodicity of the soil, which affects soil stability?**

The sodicity of the soil refers to the amount of exchangeable sodium cations compared to other cations adsorbed onto the soil. A soil with 6% or more of its exchangeable cations as sodium is called a sodic soil. Excessive exchangeable sodium can cause clay particles to disperse when in contact with water.

Sodic soils have poor structure and disperse readily when wet. Seedlings have difficulty penetrating a drying dispersed surface, and their roots have difficulty penetrating into the soil, with consequent poor germination and survival. The dispersion is caused by weak positive charges, such as sodium.
C. Progyp Improves the Physical and Chemical Properties of Soil and Promotes Conservation and Sustainable Agriculture

*Progyp impacts the physical properties of soils*

- Improves aeration/pore spaces
- Reduces surface crusting
- Improves seed emergence
- Reduces compaction/hard pans
- Improves root penetration
- Improves looseness/fluffiness
- Improves water infiltration and availability
- Reduces water and nutrient runoff
- Reduces erosion
- Improves soft and sloppy soils when wet, and hard soils when dry

*Progyp impacts the chemical properties of soils*

- Soluble Ca makes soil particles repel each other countering high Mg effects that cause soil hardening
- Reduce clay soils and dispersible and swelling properties of clay soils by displacing Na
- Reclaims high sodic/saline soils: Ca exchanges places on soil particles with Na and S captures Na (sodium sulfate) and carries it away in soil water
- Flocculating agent - aggregation or clumping of soil particles depends on positively charged ions such as Ca and Mg on exchange sites of soils – Ca is superior to all other cations
  - Relative flocculating power: Ca, 43X; Mg, 27X; K, 1.7X; Na, 1X
- Provides soil stability
- Reduce Na and Al levels in soils
- Improves cation exchange and cation exchange capacity
- Maintains proper Ca:Mg ratio (5:1) for cation exchange

Balanced Soil: High Proportion of Exchange Sites in Soils should be Occupied by Ca.
Benefits of using Progyp for soil improvement

- Improving the physical and chemical properties of soils optimizes soil and plant fertility by enhancing soil structure, nutrient availability and soil health
  - Improve crop performance
  - Improve fertilizer uptake and efficiency
  - Improve land value
  - Reduce nutrient costs

- Reduce land degradation: Demand for increased crop yields to meet global population growth has led to depleted soils. Nearly all U.S. agricultural soil is somewhat degraded and much of the soil is very degraded (USDA, Land Degradation, 2010). Poor soil conditions inhibit plant uptake of important nutrients and reduces fertilizer efficiency. To compensate, crop agriculture may over-apply fertilizers, which further stress soils and impact the environment, such as runoff of excess nutrients.

- Improves agricultural sustainability
  - Potential to reduce nonpoint source pollution contributed by agriculture: work by USDA-ARS, indicates mounting data that gypsum can curb erosion, improve water infiltration, decrease runoff, and retain phosphorus in soils. Also, berms designed to prevent nutrient runoff into the Chesapeake Bay now contain gypsum, and it’s being studied as one tool for alleviating other large-scale water quality problems.
  - $\text{S}$ ties-up $\text{N}$ as ammonium sulfate – reducing $\text{N}$ loss
  - Enhance ability to practice no-tillage on clay soils

- Energy inputs and machinery maintenance can be reduced with improved soil properties

- Highly soluble product and available Ca and S for soils
  - Water-soluble
  - $200X$ more soluble than limestone. Limestone has limited solubility in water; there must be acidity in the soil for it to react. Neutralizing soils and Ca release is a slow process and dependent on particle size of the limestone and soil factors. When limestone returns soil to a higher pH it will then stop neutralizing the soil and releasing Ca. That limits the amount of Ca delivered to the soil. Use limestone to adjust soil pH and Progyp to deliver water-soluble Ca to roots.
  - When solubilized Ca and S separate into individual ions that are highly mobile and immediately available to the soil and plant.
> Faster rate of solubility than calcium sulfate anhydrite.
> Ca from Progyp moves deeper into soil layers due to its solubility compared with limestone.
> Supplies Ca for optimum soils and plant growth.
> A lack of readily available Ca can be an energy drain on plants. Ca can only move upward in the plant. Roots have to do the work. Roots excrete acids to mobilize the Ca from the soil. The more acid needed to make the reaction occur, the more energy it takes away from production. As Progyp is much more soluble than limestone the plant can passively uptake Ca rather than expend energy.
> Highly available Ca can readily displace excessive Mg (>20%) and Na (>5%) in soils; Ca makes for better soil structure.

![Flocculation](image1.png) ![Dispersion](image2.png)

Soil dispersion is mainly caused by highly hydrated ions, such as Na\(^+\) or Mg\(^{2+}\), attracted to the surface of clay particles.

> Supplies soluble S to counter more frequently observed S deficiencies in soils:
> - Reduced atmospheric S deposition
> - High-yielding crop varieties use more S
> - Decreased use of S in pesticides
> - Declining S reserves in soil due to loss of organic matter (erosion and tillage), leaching of soils and crop removal of S

Note:
References are available upon request.
Interested in Progyp?

Please contact us for more information.