

Recent and Good Soluble Salts

At one of the discussion sessions of last summer's American Society for Horticultural Science Meetings in Davis, California, workers concerned with making recommendations to growers from soil tests brought out the fact that most of the chemical tests in use have serious limitations. It was agreed that the pH test is one of the most accurate and useful, but even it may be inaccurate when sampling is not representative of an area under test.

Soluble salt readings, while not standardized from one lab to another are possibly the most useful of all soil tests. Total soluble salts readings on a solubridge do not tell you what the salts are. If most of the salts are from calcium sulfate, the level may be much higher without serious damage to plant growth. The best soluble salt test is that made from a saturated soil paste as it considers water holding capacity of the soil along with salt level. Since this test is somewhat more involved, it was suggested that a 1-5 or a 1-2 dilution be used routinely. When the salt levels from these dilutions indicate possible danger, the soil sample should be tested further by the saturated paste method. If gypsum is the principal contributor to salts, the saturated paste method will give a lower reading than if other, more noxious salts are present.