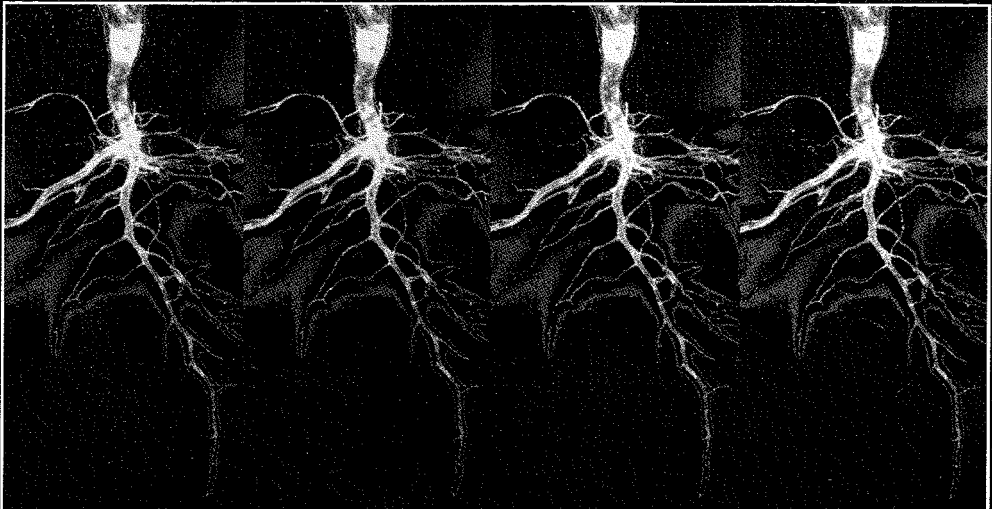




WATER RELATIONS OF PLANTS AND SOILS

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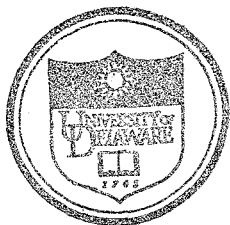
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Contents

Preface	xiii
1 HISTORICAL REVIEW	
Introduction	1
Early Research	1
The Work of Stephen Hales	2
The Century after Hales	3
The Second Half of the 19th Century	4
Early Plant Physiology in the United States	5
The 20th Century	6
From Osmosis to Water Potential	7
The Permanent Wilting Percentage	8
The Absorption of Water	8
Some General Concepts	8
Plant Water Balance	9
Soil-Plant-Atmosphere Continuum and Ohm's Law Analogy	9
Klebs Concept	9
The Situation Today	11
Changing Viewpoints	11
Increasing Emphasis at the Molecular Level	12
Summary	13
Supplementary Reading	14

2 FUNCTIONS AND PROPERTIES OF WATER

Introduction	16
Ecological Importance of Water	16
Physiological Importance of Water	17
Functions of Water in Plants	19
Constituent	20
Solvent	21
Reactant	21
Maintenance of Turgidity	21
Properties of Water	21
Unique Physical Properties	21
Explanation of Unique Properties	24
Bound Water	28
Isotopes of Water	29
Unorthodox Views Concerning Water	29
Properties of Aqueous Solutions	30
Pressure Units	31
Vapor Pressure	31
Boiling and Freezing Points	32
Osmotic Pressure or Osmotic Potential	33
Chemical Potential of Water	35
Summary	37
Supplementary Reading	37
Appendix 2.1: The van't Hoff Relation	38
Appendix 2.2: The Chemical Potential	39
Appendix 2.3: Matric Potentials	41

3 CELL WATER RELATIONS

Introduction	42
Structure	42
Osmosis	47
Water Status	49
Measuring Water Status	53
Mechanism of Osmosis	57
Changes in Water Status	61
Water Transport	63
Significance of Reflection Coefficients	64
Rates of Dehydration and Rehydration	68
Osmotic Adjustment	71
Water Relations of Cells in Tissues	75
Summary	79

Supplementary Reading	80
Appendix 3.1: Preservation of Cell Ultrastructure for Electron Microscopy	81
Appendix 3.2: Osmotic Potential and Dehydration	81
Appendix 3.3: Rates of Dehydration and Rehydration of Cells	82
4 SOIL AND WATER	
Introduction	84
Important Characteristics of Soils	84
Composition and Texture	84
Structure and Pore Space	86
Soil Profiles	88
Soil Water Terminology	89
Water Potential	89
Field Capacity	91
Permanent Wilting Percentage	92
Readily Available Water	92
Water Movement within Soils	93
Infiltration	93
Horizontal and Upward Movement	94
Measurement of Soil Water	97
Soil Water Balance	97
Direct Measurement of Soil Water Content	98
Indirect Measurement of Soil Water	99
Other Methods	101
Measurement of Soil Water Potential	102
Control of Soil Water	105
Irrigation	105
Irrigation Scheduling	107
Irrigation Problems	109
Experimental Control of Soil Water Content	110
Summary	113
Supplementary Reading	114
5 ROOTS AND ROOT SYSTEMS	
Introduction	115
Functions of Roots	115
Anchorage	116
Roots as Absorbing Organs	116
Synthetic Functions	116
Roots as Sensors of Water Stress	117

Root Growth	118
Epidermis and Root Hairs	120
Endodermis	123
Secondary Growth	124
Root Contraction	124
Rate and Periodicity of Root Growth	125
Depth and Spread of Roots	126
Longevity of Roots	128
The Absorbing Zone of Roots	128
Absorption through Suberized Roots	130
Mycorrhizae	130
Development of Root Systems	134
Root–Shoot Interrelationships	136
Root Grafting	140
Metabolic Cost of Root Systems	142
Environmental Factors Affecting Root Growth	143
Soil Texture and Structure	143
Soil Moisture	145
Soil Aeration	147
Soil Temperature	157
Root Competition	158
Allelopathy	159
The Replant Problem	160
Biochemistry of Competition and Infection	160
Atmospheric Conditions	161
Miscellaneous Effects	161
Methods of Studying Root Systems	162
Summary	164
Supplementary Reading	165

6 THE ABSORPTION OF WATER AND ROOT AND STEM PRESSURES

Introduction	167
Absorption Mechanisms	167
Passive Absorption by Transpiring Plants	168
Osmotic Absorption and Root Pressure	170
Relative Importance of Osmotic and Passive Absorption	172
Characteristics of Root Pressure Exudation	173
Species Differences	173
Guttation	176

Stem Pressures	178
Maple Sap Flow	178
Other Stem Pressures	179
Latex and Oleoresins	181
Absorption of Dew and Fog through Leaves	181
Factors Affecting Water Absorption through Roots	182
Efficiency of Root Systems in Absorption	183
Resistances to Water Movement in the Soil-Plant System	187
Environmental Factors	190
Efflux of Water from Roots and Hydraulic Lift	198
Summary	199
Supplementary Reading	199
 7 TRANSPIRATION AND THE ASCENT OF SAP	
Introduction	201
The Importance of Transpiration	201
The Process of Transpiration	204
Evaporating Surfaces	204
Driving Forces and Resistances	205
Energy Relations	207
Vapor Pressure Gradients	209
Resistances to Diffusion	211
Other Factors Affecting Transpiration	214
Leaves	214
Disease	223
Measurement of Transpiration and Evaporation	223
Measurement of Transpiration of Plants and Leaves	224
Evapotranspiration from Stands of Plants	230
The Ascent of Sap	234
The Conducting System	234
The Mechanism of Sap Rise	249
Conduction in Leaves	251
Use of Xylem Sap by Parasites	253
Summary	253
Supplementary Reading	255
 8 STOMATA AND GAS EXCHANGE	
Introduction	257
Historical Review	257
Occurrence and Frequency	258

Stomatal Functioning	260
Guard Cells	260
Stomatal Behavior	262
Mechanism of Stomatal Opening and Closing	263
Factors Affecting Stomatal Aperture	265
The Role of Light	265
Carbon Dioxide	267
Humidity	268
Temperature	269
Wind	270
Mineral Nutrition	271
Stomata and Air Pollution	271
Stomata and Fungi	272
Internal Factors Affecting Stomata	272
Anomalous Behavior of Stomata	273
Cycling	273
Heterogeneity in Stomatal Response	274
Optimization	276
Diffusive Capacity of Stomata	277
Bulk Flow in Leaves	277
Measurement of Stomatal Aperture and Conductance	277
Visual Observations	279
Infiltration	279
Porometers	280
Summary	281
Supplementary Reading	282

9 ION TRANSPORT AND NITROGEN METABOLISM

Introduction	283
Ion Uptake and Transport	285
Optimum Conditions	285
Effects of Dehydrating Conditions	290
Nitrogen Metabolism	291
Nitrogen Fixation	294
Nitrate Metabolism	298
Protein Synthesis	301
Dehydration and Root/Shoot Signals	304
Dehydration and Enzyme Activity	306
Direct Enzyme Effects	306
Regulator Hypothesis of Enzyme Control	308

Summary	310
Supplementary Reading	312
10 PHOTOSYNTHESIS AND RESPIRATION	
Introduction	313
Photosynthesis and Water Availability	315
Flooding and Dehydration of Soil	315
Mechanisms of the Photosynthesis Response	319
Respiration Changes	319
Substrate Starvation	321
Metabolic Inhibition	328
Plant Signals That Trigger the Metabolic Response	332
Acclimation	336
Recovery	337
Translocation	340
Summary	341
Supplementary Reading	342
11 GROWTH	
Introduction	344
Growth of Single Cells	346
Growth in Complex Tissues	351
Growth-Induced Water Potentials	353
Gradients in Water Potential during Growth	354
Transpiration and Growth	358
Growth at Low Water Potentials	360
Primary Signals	363
Metabolic Changes	366
Ecological and Agricultural Significance	372
Summary	374
Supplementary Reading	375
12 EVOLUTION AND AGRICULTURAL WATER USE	
Introduction	377
Measuring Evolutionary Pressures	378
Environmental Limitations on Yield	380
Water Use Efficiency	383
Measuring Water Use Efficiency	387
Drought Tolerance	390
Improvement of Drought Tolerance	391
Water Deficits and Reproduction	395

xii Contents

Desiccation	398
Antitranspirants	400
Summary	402
Supplementary Reading	403
References	405
Index	482

Preface

Everyone who grows plants, whether a single geranium in a flower pot or hundreds of acres of corn or cotton, is aware of the importance of water for successful growth. Water supply not only affects the yield of gardens and field crops, but also controls the distribution of plants over the earth's surface, ranging from deserts and grasslands to rain forests, depending on the amount and seasonal distribution of precipitation. However, few people understand fully why water is so important for plant growth. This book attempts to explain its importance by showing how water affects the physiological processes that control the quantity and quality of growth. It is a useful introduction for students, teachers, and investigators in both basic and applied plant science, including botanists, crop scientists, foresters, horticulturists, soil scientists, and even gardeners and farmers who desire a better understanding of how their plants grow. An attempt has been made to present the information in terms intelligible to readers with various backgrounds. If the treatment of some topics seems inadequate to specialists in certain fields, they are reminded that the book was not written for specialists, but as an introduction to the broad field of plant water relations. As an aid in this respect, a laboratory manual is available with detailed instructions for some of the more complex methods (J. S. Boyer *in* "Measuring the Water Status of Plants and Soils," Academic Press, San Diego, 1995).

We begin with a brief review of the research on plant water relations from Aristotle to the 20th century, including the development of such basic concepts as plant water balance, the soil-plant-atmosphere continuum, and the Klebs concept showing that both genetic potentialities and environmental factors

modify growth through their effects on physiological processes and conditions. Some current questions, such as the role of roots as sensors of water stress and the increasing importance of investigations at the cellular and molecular level, are mentioned briefly in preparation for later discussion. Succeeding chapters are devoted to the unique properties of water and to cell water relations, providing an opportunity to define some of the terminology and units used in later chapters. Cell water relations are discussed in detail because they are basic to later discussions of plant water relations. Soil is discussed as a reservoir for water and a medium for root growth, root structure and growth are discussed with respect to the absorption of water and minerals, and the transport of water to the transpiring shoots is discussed in detail. Considerable attention is given to transpiration and the role of stomata in controlling it because transpiration often dominates plant water relations. Finally, we discuss the effects of water deficits on various physiological processes that control growth and yield of plants.

There is considerable cross referencing among chapters but there is also some repetition of material in various chapters. This is intended to make each chapter a fairly complete unit that can be read without excessive referral to other chapters, facilitating use of the book as a reference.

The need for a book summarizing modern views on plant water relations has been increased by the large volume of publications and the changes in viewpoint that have occurred in recent years. A number of books on plant water relations have appeared, but most of them are collections of papers on special topics. This book attempts to present the entire field of water relations in an organized manner, using current concepts and a consistent, simple terminology. Emphasis is placed on the interdependence of various processes. For example, the rate of water absorption is closely linked to the rate of transpiration by the sap stream in the vascular system, and it also is affected by resistance to water flow into roots and by soil factors affecting the availability of water. The rate of transpiration depends primarily on the energy supply, the stomatal opening, and the leaf water supply. Proper functioning of the physiological processes involved in growth requires a favorable water balance, which is controlled by relative rates of water absorption and water loss by transpiration. These complex interrelationships are discussed and described in modern terminology.

The large volume of publications in recent years makes it impossible to cite all of the relevant literature and many good papers have been omitted. Nevertheless, the bibliography is extensive enough to serve as an introduction to the literature in most areas of plant water relations research.

The present lively research activity is producing significant changes in explanations of various phenomena, and some long held views may have to be modified or abandoned. Examples of new trends are the recent emphasis on roots rather than leaves as primary sensors of water stress, the role of cell wall metabolism versus turgor in cell expansion, questions concerning the validity of

water potential as a measure of plant water status, and the importance of osmotic adjustment. Even the cohesion theory of the ascent of sap is being questioned. Another new concept is the ecological importance of "hydraulic lift," or the supplying of water to shallow rooted plants by deeper rooted plants. Research at the molecular level is providing a better understanding of the reasons for such phenomena as differences in drought tolerance among species and cultivars. It also suggests the possibility of increasing plant drought tolerance by the genetic engineering of crop plants to minimize the effects of water stress.

Differences in opinion among various investigators are discussed, and in some instances the authors have indicated their preference, but it is pointed out that in many instances more research is needed before conclusions can be reached. We hope the uncertainty about some phenomena will challenge investigators to develop better explanations. Readers are reminded that so-called scientific facts often are merely the most logical explanations that can be developed from the available information. As additional research provides more information, it frequently becomes necessary to revise generally accepted explanations, and some that seem logical today may become untenable later.

This book owes more to interactions with other scientists than can be easily identified. We are indebted to our many graduate students and postdoctoral research associates and to our colleagues for their valuable suggestions. We especially acknowledge E. L. Fiscus, M. R. Kaufmann, J. S. MacFall, and C. D. Raper, Jr., for their useful comments on several chapters. We also acknowledge the assistance of Peggy Conlon in Dr. Boyer's office in typing several chapters and in preparing the bibliography, Dr. An-Ching Tang for preparing the artwork in several chapters, and the secretaries in the Duke University Department of Botany office who patiently typed and revised several chapters so many times.

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