



W. Garrett Owen¹



Brian E. Whipker²

Volume 4 Number 10 May 2021

Nutritional Monitoring Series

Portulaca

(*Portulaca oleracea*)



Funding Generations of Progress
Through Research and Scholarships



Project Sponsor

Portulaca requires moderate fertility of 150 to 200 ppm N. Insufficient fertility results in stunted plants with red stems and chlorotic (yellow) foliage. Overfertilization results in excessive plant growth. Optimal substrate pH values for *portulaca* range from 6.0 to 6.5. Substrate pH above 6.5 induces interveinal chlorosis and stunts plant growth.



© W. Garrett Owen

Figure 1. Substrate pH below 6.0 during *portulaca* (*Portulaca oleracea*) research trials did not induce any nutritional disorders. Photo by: W. Garrett Owen

Target Nutrition Parameters

pH Category IV:

6.0 to 6.5

Fertility Category:

Medium

150 - 200 ppm N

EC Category B:

1:2 Extraction:

0.6 to 0.9 mS/cm

SME:

1.3 to 2.0 mS/cm

PourThru:

2.0 to 3.0 mS/cm

Portulaca

www.fertdirtandsquirt.com

¹University of Kentucky
wgowen@uky.edu

²NC State University
bwhipker@ncsu.edu



Figure 2. Substrate pH above 6.5 can cause portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*) to exhibit interveinal chlorosis (yellowing). Photo by: W. Garrett Owen.



Figure 3. Substrate pH above 6.5 can stunt portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*) plant growth without exhibiting interveinal chlorosis (yellowing). Photo by: W. Garrett Owen.

© W. Garrett Owen

Fertility Management of Portulaca

Portulaca or purslane should be grown with a substrate pH range of 6.0 to 6.5. Use recommended 1:2 Extraction, SME, or PourThru methods to determine and monitor substrate pH and soluble salts [referred to as electrical conductivity (EC)] values. Additionally, conduct routine foliar analysis tests to monitor crop nutrient status. Leaf tissue nutrient levels found in leaves of portulaca are listed in Table 1, which can serve as a guideline in diagnosing suspected nutrient disorders. Monitoring substrate pH and nutrient status will enable growers to avoid pH induced nutritional disorders.

Substrate pH below 6.0 can result in an increase uptake of iron (Fe) and manganese (Mn) to toxic levels which will accumulate in leaf tissue. In research trials, low substrate pH symptomologies were attempted to be induced. No low pH-induced symptoms were observed, and plants grew 'normally' and flowered (Fig. 1). Nonetheless, corrective procedures for low substrate pH should begin around 5.6. Substrate pH below 5.4 to 5.6 will inhibit magnesium (Mg) uptake causing lower or older leaves to become Mg-deficient and exhibit interveinal chlorosis (yellowing). Monthly applications of supplemental Mg in the form of magnesium sulfate ($MgSO_4$; Epsom salts) at a rate of 8 oz./100 gal. of water in areas with naturally occurring Mg in the water supply or 16 oz./100 gal. of water in areas lacking Mg in the irrigation water will prevent Mg deficiency and symptomology development.

High substrate pH above 6.5 can inhibit Fe uptake causing newly developed and recently matured leaves to become Fe-deficient and exhibit interveinal chlorosis (Fig. 2). Plant growth can also become stunted (Fig. 3). Corrective procedures for high substrate pH should begin at 6.6 or higher.

During portulaca production, maintain moderate fertility levels of 150 to 200 ppm N. Insufficient fertility levels (low EC) will often result in chlorotic foliage (Fig. 4). When fertility is severely limited, plant growth will become stalled (Fig. 5) with red stems (Fig. 6) and leaves with reddened leaf margins (Fig. 7).

Overfertilization (high EC) results in excessive plant growth (Fig. 8). If EC values become excessive, leach the substrate with clear irrigation water twice before providing fertility. It is best to monitor the crop to avoid excessive EC values than to waste fertilizer by leaching it from the pots.

Summary

Providing low to medium fertility at 150 to 200 ppm N and maintaining a pH of 6.0 to 6.5 will help prevent most nutritional disorders.

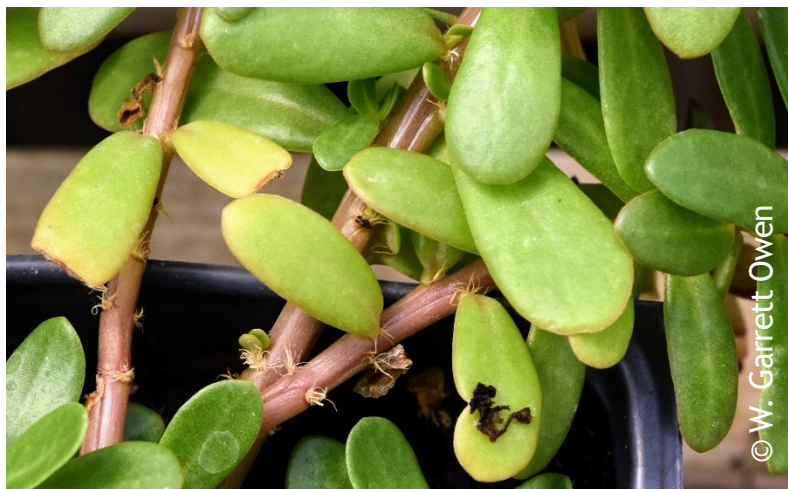


Figure 4. Providing insufficient fertility [low electrical conductivity (EC)] during portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*) production can result in chlorotic (pale green or yellow). Photo by: W. Garrett Owen.



© W. Garrett Owen

Figure 5. Providing insufficient fertility [low electrical conductivity (EC)] during portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*) production can result in stunted plant growth. Photo by: W. Garrett Owen.



Figure 6. Providing insufficient fertility [low electrical conductivity (EC)] during portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*) production can result in red stems. Photo by: W. Garrett Owen.



Figure 7. Providing insufficient fertility [low electrical conductivity (EC)] during portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*) production can result in red leaves and leaf margins. Photo by: W. Garrett Owen.

Substrate EC

Low

High



© W. Garrett Owen

Figure 8. Providing excessive fertility [high electrical conductivity (EC)] during portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*) production can result in lush plant growth. Photo by: W. Garrett Owen.

Table 1. Published foliar nutrient concentrations for portulaca (*Portulaca* sp.).

| Element | | Recommended Range ¹ |
|-----------------|-------|--------------------------------|
| Nitrogen (N) | (%) | 2.45 - 5.49 |
| Phosphorus (P) | | 0.35 - 1.07 |
| Potassium (K) | | 2.25 - 6.74 |
| Calcium (Ca) | | 0.45 - 0.87 |
| Magnesium (Mg) | | 0.40 - 1.28 |
| Sulfur (S) | | 0.23 - 0.57 |
| Iron (Fe) | (ppm) | 45 - 115 |
| Manganese (Mn) | | 30 - 308 |
| Zinc (Zn) | | 34 - 147 |
| Copper (Cu) | | 5 - 10 |
| Boron (B) | | 15 - 32 |
| Molybdenum (Mo) | | 0.25 - 0.71 |

Source: ¹ Bryson and Mills (2015) for greenhouse-grown portulaca. These values represent matured leaves from new growth.



American
Floral
Endowment

Funding Generations of Progress
Through Research and Scholarships



Electronic
Grower
Resources
Online

Project Sponsor

Corrective Procedures for Modifying Substrate pH and Electrical Conductivity (EC)

When the pH or substrate electrical conductivity (EC) drifts into unwanted territory, adjustments must be made. Below are the standard corrective procedures used to modify the substrate pH and EC for greenhouse grown crops in soilless substrates.

1. Low Substrate pH Correction

When Fe and Mn toxicity becomes a problem, adjust (raising) substrate pH to the recommended pH range. Corrective procedures to raise low pH levels are listed below. Switching to a basic fertilizer when the substrate pH is nearing the lower limit will help stabilize the pH. If the pH is below the recommended range, then corrective procedures will need to be implemented. Flowable lime is one option. Using a rate of 2 quarts per 100 gallons of water will typically increase the substrate pH by roughly 0.5 pH units. Two quarts can be used through an injector. Additional applications can be made if needed. Potassium bicarbonate (KHCO_3) can also be applied. A rate of 2 pounds per 100 gallons of water will increase the substrate pH by roughly 0.8 pH units. This treatment will also provide excessive potassium (K) and cause a spike in the substrate EC. A leaching irrigation with clear water is required the following day to restore the nutrient balance (the ratio of K:Ca:Mg) and lower the EC. As always, remember to recheck your substrate pH to determine if reapplications are needed.

pH Adjustment Recommendations

Flowable Lime

- Use 1 to 2 quarts per 100 gallons of water.
Rinse foliage.
- Avoid damage to your injector by using rates of 2 quarts per 100 gallons of water, or less.
- Can split applications.

Hydrated Lime

- Mix 1 pound in 3 to 5 gallons of WARM water. Mix twice. Let settle. Decant liquid and apply through injector at 1:15.
- Caustic (rinse foliage ASAP and avoid skin contact)

Potassium Bicarbonate (KHCO_3)

- Use 2 pounds per 100 gallons of water
- Rinse foliage immediately.
- Provides 933 ppm K.
- Leach heavily the following day with a complete fertilizer to reduce substrate EC and restore nutrient balance.
- Rates greater than 2 pounds per 100 gallons of water can cause phytotoxicity!

2. High Substrate pH Correction

The target pH for many species is between 5.8 and 6.2. Higher pH values will result in Fe deficiency and lead to the development of interveinal chlorosis on the upper leaves. Check the substrate pH to determine if it is too high. Be careful when lowering the substrate pH, because going too low can be much more problematic and difficult to deal with.

Acid-based Fertilizer

If the substrate pH is just beginning to increase, then first consider switching to an acidic-based fertilizer. These ammoniacal-nitrogen (N) based fertilizers are naturally acidic and plant nitrogen uptake will help moderate the substrate pH over a week or two.

Acid Water Drench

Some growers use this intermediate correction if pH levels are not excessively high, and a quick lower of the substrate pH is desired. Use sulfuric acid to acidify your irrigation water to a pH 4.0 to 4.5. Apply this acid water as a substrate drench providing 5 to 10% excessive leaching of the substrate. Rinse the foliage to avoid phytotoxicity. Results should be visible within 5 days. Retest the substrate pH and repeat if needed.

Iron Drench

If the levels are excessively high, then an Fe chelate application can be made to the substrate.

Below are the options.

Iron Chelate Drench (options)

- Iron-EDDHA: mix 5 ounces in 100 gallons of water
- Iron-DTPA: mix 5 ounces in 100 gallons of water
- Iron sulfate: mix 4-8 ounces in 100 gallons of water
- Apply as a substrate drench with sufficient volume to leach the pot.
- Rinse foliage immediately.
- Avoid use on iron efficient plants (geraniums).

3. Low EC Correction

If low EC problems occur, increase the fertilization rate to 300 ppm N for a few applications before returning to the recommend fertilization rate for the crop.

4. High EC Correction

Excessively high fertilization rates will result in a marginal leaf burn. Check the substrate EC to confirm your diagnosis. Values greater than 6.0 mS/cm based on the PourThru sampling method can be problematic for many plants.

Switch to Clear Water Irrigations

If the substrate EC is just beginning to increase over time, then leach with a few clear water irrigations to lower EC levels by flushing out the salts.

Clear Water Leaching

If the EC values are excessively high, leach the substrate twice with back-to-back clear water irrigations. Then allow the substrate to dry down normally before retesting the EC. If EC levels are still too high, repeat the double leach. Once the substrate EC is back within the normal range, use a balanced fertilizer at a rate of 150 to 200 ppm N.



e-GRO Alert

www.e-gro.org

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Nora Catlin
Floriculture Specialist
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Suffolk County
nora.catlin@cornell.edu

Dr. Chris Currey
Assistant Professor of Floriculture
Iowa State University
ccurrey@iastate.edu

Dr. Ryan Dickson
Greenhouse Horticulture and
Controlled-Environment Agriculture
University of Arkansas
ryand@uark.edu

Thomas Ford
Commercial Horticulture Educator
Penn State Extension
tfz@psu.edu

Dan Gilrein
Entomology Specialist
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Suffolk County
dog1@cornell.edu

Dr. Joyce Latimer
Floriculture Extension & Research
Virginia Tech
jlatime@vt.edu

Heidi Lindberg
Floriculture Extension Educator
Michigan State University
wolleage@anr.msu.edu

Dr. Roberto Lopez
Floriculture Extension & Research
Michigan State University
rglopez@msu.edu

Dr. Neil Mattson
Greenhouse Research & Extension
Cornell University
neil.mattson@cornell.edu

Dr. W. Garrett Owen
Greenhouse Extension & Research
University of Kentucky
wgowen@uky.edu

Dr. Rosa E. Raudales
Greenhouse Extension Specialist
University of Connecticut
rosa.raudales@uconn.edu

Dr. Beth Scheckelhoff
Extension Educator - Greenhouse Systems
The Ohio State University
scheckelhoff.11@osu.edu

Dr. Ariana Torres-Bravo
Horticulture / Ag. Economics
Purdue University
torres2@purdue.edu

Dr. Brian Whipker
Floriculture Extension & Research
NC State University
bwhipker@ncsu.edu

Dr. Jean Williams-Woodward
Ornamental Extension Plant Pathologist
University of Georgia
jwoodwar@uga.edu

Copyright ©2021

Where trade names, proprietary products, or specific equipment are listed, no discrimination is intended and no endorsement, guarantee or warranty is implied by the authors, universities or associations.

Cooperating Universities



In cooperation with our local and state greenhouse organizations



Metro Detroit Flower Growers Association

