



GROMOR (PTY) LTD
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P.O. Box 89, Cato Ridge 3680 • Tel: 031 782 0002, 031 782 3105

Fax: 031 782 1431, 086 641 2589

Cell: 083 946 6079, E-mail: gromor@iafrica.com

www.gromor.co.za

GROMOR AUGUST 2015 NEWSLETTER

Fifty years ago no one could have foreseen a water shortage in KZN. Now Shongweni dam is virtually silted up and Hazelmere dam has lost $\pm 20\%$ of its capacity in just 12 years. Like all droughts, this one has been frightening! Let's not forget it when the spring rains come. Firstly, in designing a garden utilise plants that require a minimum or preferably no watering, once they're established. Secondly, apply cultivation practices that will conserve moisture.

There are a number of soil conditions that negatively effect plant moisture use, some of which we'll consider hereunder.

Both TOP and SUBSOIL ACIDITY are problems in many KZN soils, aggravated by poor cultivation practices, one of them being the failure to apply LIME. 300g/m^2 (3 tons/ha) dug in deeply every 3 years is a good yardstick to follow. Unfortunately digging it in deeply is necessary, as LIME does NOT leach down the soil profile.

Where digging it in is impossible, as on a lawn for example, apply 100g/m^2 as a topdressing every 3 years to supply the essential nutrients calcium and magnesium.

GROMOR supplies DOLOMITIC LIME, in 10kg and 50kg bags. If the soil is not particularly acid (pH NOT under 5,6) try a dressing of GYPSUM, which supplies CALCIUM and SULPHUR. Apply at 100g per m^2 . GYPSUM, which comes in 50kg bags, does gradually leach down the soil profile, but will not change soil pH as LIME does. SULPHUR'S importance in crop production was highlighted at a recent Omnia information day.

I'm told that AVOS, NUTS and FRUIT TREES respond well to dressings of GYPSUM.

Much of our soil acidity, including SUBSOIL acidity, has come from the injudicious OVER APPLICATION of ammonium based nitrogenous fertilizers: LAN, UREA, Ammonium Sulphate and compound mixtures like 4.1.1, 3.2.1 etc. The ammonium in these fertilizers, causes a "population explosion" of the SOIL MICRO ORGANISMS which literally "gobble" up the SOIL ORGANIC MATTER, causing it to drop to the extent that it can no longer hold the applied nitrogen, which then gets leached down into the subsoil, causing SUBSOIL ACIDITY.

The result is a poor plant ROOT SYSTEM in the TOPSOIL because of excessive acidity, compounded by the roots avoiding penetration into the SUBSOIL as well, due to SUBSOIL ACIDITY. The resultant poor root system, battles to keep the plant adequately supplied with moisture to function properly during dry spells, let alone in droughts.

Rod Humphris the Omnia CEO recently expressed the view that with the right nutrient practices, water usage could be significantly reduced.

These negative SOIL ACIDITY effects can partially be countered by maintaining SOIL ORGANIC MATTER (SOM) levels above $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ and avoiding excessive applications of AMMONIUM based NITROGENOUS fertilizers.

Many soil analysis do not give SOIL ORGANIC MATTER (SOM). They do however invariably give the percentage CARBON (C). $\text{C}\% \times 1,6 = \text{SOM}\%$.

In the garden, where SOIL ANALYSIS is understandably not regularly carried out, soil organic matter (SOM) levels can be maintained above a $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ minimum, with annual applications of GROMOR COMPOST at $1 \times 30\text{dm}^3$ bag/ 5m^2 to 10m^2 . GROMOR compost is also available in 50dm^3 bags – apply at a bag per 15m^2 to 20m^2 .

2½% SOIL ORGANIC MATTER (SOM) is the minimum to aim for. A healthy soil, with 4% SOM will hold ±180kg of water, whilst that same soil with 2% SOM will hold just ±60kg water. A century ago most of our soils had over 10% SOM.

In agriculture, conserving and reincorporating crop residues and utilising NO TILL, must surely be the way to go to conserve SOIL ORGANIC MATTER. I always shudder when I see cane being burnt before cutting. Whilst it may not be economically viable, I despair that some way of “trashing” leaves and tops cannot be found to replace burning. I worked in the cane industry in 1963 when some of the more progressive farmers were practicing “trashing”, but this was obviously not economical, as it does not seem to have been continued.

Burning has helped GROMOR sell more chicken litter for application on canelands, where its use has worked miracles, not only by supplying nutrients, but also contributing to SOM.

I found it interesting chatting about the above to some Australian farmers visiting South Africa for the Polocrosse World Cup. They don't burn, instead they use mechanical cane harvesters which “top” the cane, strip off most of the leaves and chop the stalks into sections of ±30cm. Surprisingly, the leaves and tops were not incorporated into the soil, instead they were baled and sold for composting, animal bedding or garden mulch.

When it comes to fertilizers in the garden, 2.3.2(22) remains the most popular, but if you haven't yet tried it, buy a bag of GROMOR ACCELERATOR ORGANIC FERTILIZER PELLETS and apply it at 150g/m² (1½ tons/ha).

NB: Applied to the lawn as a topdressing you will be very popular with your dog! They love it and to date we've never heard of it causing them any harm!

If you would rather stick to conventional chemical inorganic compound fertilizers, GROMOR 4.1.1(21) has established itself as the lawn fertilizer of choice. For the lawn*, vege and flower beds, give GROMOR 5.1.5(28) a try. The extra POTASSIUM can “strengthen” plants against disease attacks. As a general “rule of thumb” apply these fertilizers at 50g/m² in spring and summer.

*I do particularly like the use of GROMOR 5.1.5(28) on lawns where the clippings are removed when mowing. This is because the clippings are high in potassium, which is higher in 5.1.5 than 4.1.1, LAN etc.

MULCHING is also a moisture conservation tool, which can be effectively applied to SHRUBS, FLOWER and VEGE beds. Whilst GROMOR MACADAMIA NUTSHELLS look great as a MULCH on POTPLANTS, they are simply too expensive to use on open ground where GROMOR PINEBARK MULCH, supplied in 50dm³ bags, is both attractive and economical to use. MULCHING reduces soil moisture evaporation and has the added advantage of reducing weed growth – unfortunately not totally eliminating it!

Here is a tip for those of you who are being driven crazy by weeds. Turn soil at night before planting! In test plots ploughed at night there were only half as many weeds compared to adjacent plots ploughed during the day!

Regards,
GROMOR PTY (LTD)

R. HAGEN

PS: We had a fantastic POLOCROSSE WORLD CUP at Shongweni in July. (NB: Polocrosse not Polo)

It was exceptionally well organised with over 5000 spectators, cheering the Protea team to victory against teams from the USA, Ireland, UK, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Australia and New Zealand. Particularly pleasing was beating Australia, who held the World NO1 spot for many years. I always love reading the captions on T shirts, but never have I seen a more appropriate one than was reflected on an Australian T shirt." My beer drinking team has a polocrosse problem!"

Light travels at 186 000 miles per second (670 000 000 mph). At the speed of light it would take between 100 000 to 150 000 years to cross just our galaxy and billions of years to reach other galaxies!

The early Romans are recognised by many people as the cleverest people that ever lived. Why? Because they learned to read and write Latin!