
Books on this topic typically focus on either plant nutrition or qualities of soil or growing medium with respect to plants; indeed the first edition (*Plant Nutrition Manual, CRC Press, 1998*) does that. This work combines the two, integrating two logically connected subjects. Dr. Jones has written a concise manual that provides both quick reference and a text for a course on these topics, suitable for use by both academics and practitioners.

The Manual covers the basic principles both of soil fertility and of plant nutrition, and is comprised of sections on physical and chemical characteristics of soils, details of major and minor elemental nutrients required by plants, methods of assessment of both plant nutrition status and soil fertility, and how to amend the soil, with both standard and organic practices, to maintain soil fertility. A separate section follows on soil-less growing media, and a final section is a catch-all for miscellaneous topics. Several appendixes, references, and a subject index complete the book. Throughout, the author uses an outline format, bulleted lists, and tables, charts and diagrams to condense material into short chapters.

The author’s approach is practical rather than theoretical, intended to acquaint the reader with concepts and factors needed to understand how to grow plants successfully, and how to diagnose problems. He also addresses misconceptions where warranted. In the section on miscellany, Dr. Benton touches on organic farming/gardening, a growing segment of the market, giving a neutral explanation of its history, the imprecise nature of what “organic” can mean, and where he deems its claims are unsubstantiated.

Most terminology is defined as it is encountered, but at least one term left this reviewer puzzled. On page 65 is a list of terms defined for soil organic matter components. There we find: *Phytomass*: (For example, standing dead trees) are also considered phytomass.” This odd punctuation and fragmentary sentence structure is likely to be the consequence of poor editing. On the next page, I believe there is also a typo in the term “Liter” which should surely be “Litter” instead. But overall, the writing is easily understood.

In the Preface, the author pays his respects to the historical role of the Land-Grant Cooperative Extension Service, which used to provide instruction and assistance in these subjects to farmers and growers. These days, the system is a shell of its former self; also, research has revealed more complexity in the relationships between factors, and farm advisors tend to specialize in aspects of the system. This manual provides a useful overview, incorporating recent research into management practices and up-to-date references. I recommend it as a reference and a text for academic libraries and practitioners alike.

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