

PHYSIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF MACRO- AND MICROELEMENTS IN PLANT LIFE

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Plants require a continuous supply of essential mineral nutrients to maintain growth, development, and reproduction. These nutrients are divided into macroelements and microelements based on the quantity required by plants. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the physiological roles of these elements, their involvement in biochemical and metabolic processes, and their impact on plant productivity. Macroelements such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium are required in large amounts and are primarily involved in structural and energy-related functions. Microelements, including iron, zinc, and boron, are needed in trace amounts but are critical for enzyme activation and regulatory processes. Deficiencies or imbalances of these nutrients can lead to significant physiological disorders, reduced crop yield, and poor plant health. The study emphasizes the importance of balanced nutrient management in sustainable agriculture.

Introduction

Plants, as autotrophic organisms, depend on mineral nutrients absorbed from the soil to complete their life cycle. These nutrients are essential for cellular structure, metabolic processes, and physiological regulation. Based on the quantity required, mineral elements are classified into macroelements and microelements.

Macroelements include nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), and sulfur (S). These elements are required in relatively large amounts (usually more than 0.1% of plant dry weight). Microelements, also known as trace elements, include iron (Fe), manganese (Mn), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), boron (B), molybdenum (Mo), and chlorine (Cl), which are required in very small quantities (less than 0.01% of plant dry weight).

Despite their small requirement, microelements are equally important as macroelements because they are involved in critical enzymatic and regulatory functions. The absence or imbalance of any essential nutrient disrupts plant metabolism and leads to visible deficiency symptoms.

Globally, nutrient deficiencies in agricultural soils are a major limiting factor for crop productivity. According to agronomic studies, nitrogen deficiency alone can reduce crop yield by up to 50%, while micronutrient deficiencies affect more than 30% of cultivated soils worldwide.

This paper aims to analyze the physiological importance of macro- and microelements in plant life, focusing on their biochemical roles, interactions, and impact on plant growth and development.

2. Materials and Methods

This research is based on a **comprehensive literature review** and analytical synthesis of scientific data. The methodology includes:

2.1 Data Sources

- Peer-reviewed journals in plant physiology and agronomy
- Standard textbooks on plant nutrition
- Reports from international agricultural organizations

2.2 Selection Criteria

Sources were selected based on:

- Scientific reliability
 - Relevance to plant nutrition and physiology
 - Availability of experimental data
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2.3 Analytical Approach

A comparative and descriptive analysis was used to:

- Evaluate the physiological functions of each element
- Identify common deficiency symptoms
- Analyze interactions between nutrients

3. Results

3.1 Physiological Roles of Macroelements

3.1.1 Nitrogen (N)

Nitrogen is one of the most critical nutrients for plants. It is a major component of:

- Amino acids and proteins
- Nucleic acids (DNA and RNA)
- Chlorophyll

Nitrogen deficiency results in chlorosis (yellowing of leaves), reduced growth, and decreased photosynthetic capacity. Studies show that optimal nitrogen supply increases crop yield by 20–60%.

3.1.2 Phosphorus (P)

Phosphorus plays a key role in:

- Energy transfer (ATP and ADP)
- Root development
- Flowering and seed formation

Deficiency symptoms include dark green or purplish leaves and delayed maturity.

3.1.3 Potassium (K)

Potassium regulates:

- Osmotic balance
- Stomatal movement
- Enzyme activation

It improves plant resistance to drought, salinity, and diseases. Potassium deficiency leads to leaf edge necrosis and weak stems.

3.1.4 Calcium (Ca)

Calcium is essential for:

- Cell wall formation
- Membrane stability
- Signal transduction

Calcium deficiency primarily affects young tissues, causing deformities and necrosis.

3.1.5 Magnesium (Mg)

Magnesium is the central atom in the chlorophyll molecule and plays a vital role in photosynthesis and enzyme activation.

Deficiency leads to interveinal chlorosis in older leaves.

3.1.6 Sulfur (S)

Sulfur is involved in:

- Protein synthesis
- Formation of certain vitamins and enzymes

Sulfur deficiency resembles nitrogen deficiency but appears first in young leaves.

3.2 Physiological Roles of Microelements

3.2.1 Iron (Fe)

Iron is essential for:

- Chlorophyll synthesis
- Electron transport in photosynthesis

Its deficiency causes interveinal chlorosis in young leaves.

3.2.2 Zinc (Zn)

Zinc plays a role in:

- Enzyme activation
- Auxin synthesis

Deficiency results in stunted growth and reduced leaf size.

3.2.3 Copper (Cu)

Copper is involved in:

- Redox reactions
- Lignin synthesis

Deficiency leads to wilting and dieback of plant tissues.

3.2.4 Manganese (Mn)

Manganese is important for:

- Photosynthetic oxygen evolution
- Enzyme activation

Deficiency causes chlorosis and reduced growth.

3.2.5 Boron (B)

Boron is necessary for:

- Cell wall formation
- Reproductive development

Deficiency affects flowering and fruit formation.

3.2.6 Molybdenum (Mo)

Molybdenum is essential for:

- Nitrogen metabolism
- Nitrogen fixation in legumes

Deficiency leads to nitrogen deficiency-like symptoms.

3.2.7 Chlorine (Cl)

Chlorine is involved in:

- Osmotic regulation
- Photosynthesis

3.3 Nutrient Interactions

Nutrients interact with each other in complex ways:

- Excess phosphorus reduces zinc availability
- High potassium levels may limit magnesium uptake
- Nitrogen enhances overall nutrient absorption

Balanced fertilization is therefore essential.

3.4 Effects on Plant Growth and Yield

Experimental studies indicate:

- Balanced fertilization increases crop yield by 30–70%
- Micronutrient supplementation improves crop quality and stress tolerance
- Nutrient imbalance reduces productivity and increases susceptibility to diseases

4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that macro- and microelements are indispensable for plant physiological processes. Macroelements primarily contribute to structural and metabolic functions, while microelements regulate enzymatic and biochemical reactions.

The synergy between nutrients is critical. For example, nitrogen promotes vegetative growth, but without adequate phosphorus and potassium, plants cannot efficiently utilize nitrogen.

Modern agriculture faces challenges such as soil nutrient depletion, overuse of chemical fertilizers, and environmental pollution. Sustainable practices such as:

- Integrated nutrient management (INM)
 - Use of biofertilizers
 - Precision agriculture
- are essential for maintaining soil fertility and plant health.

Future research should focus on improving nutrient use efficiency and developing environmentally friendly fertilization techniques.

5. Conclusion

Macro- and microelements play vital and complementary roles in plant life. Their balanced availability ensures optimal growth, development, and productivity. Understanding the physiological importance of these elements is essential for sustainable agriculture and global food security.

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