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Leaf Analysis in Citrus: Recent Development

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Y. Herojit Singh⁵, C.G. Sawant⁶, Lalmingsanga⁷, R. Lalrinfeli⁸

Abstract

This article encompasses nutrient diagnosis through leaf analysis and leaf nutrient composition. The corresponding leaf nutrient values expressed in % were: N (2.23–2.49), P (0.10–0.11), K (1.86–2.12), Ca (2.12–2.32), Mg (0.28–0.38), and in ppm Fe (148.2–179.8), Mn (72.2–84.8), Cu (10.4–18.6), and Zn (24.2–38.8) representing eight states viz., West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur. Nutrient constraints in the form of nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, copper and zinc through leaf nutrient diagnostics tools were diagnosed. It finds a due place in the region's fertilizer program of mandarin orchards to obtain sustainable optimum fruit yield. While through leaf analysis in Manipur, DRIS indices revealed different nutrients to be ordered as zinc < phosphorus < calcium < magnesium < nitrogen < potassium < iron < manganese < copper.

Keywords: DRIS, leaf nutrient diagnosis, Khasi mandarin, NE India.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, citrus is one of the essential fruit crops being cultivated in an area of 3.35 million ha, with a total production of 91 million tons. The current average productivity of citrus orchards in India is 8.9 tons ha⁻¹ compared to 4.52 tons ha⁻¹ obtained in northeast India [1–6]. The region is historically believed to have witnessed the citrus distribution to other parts of the globe. In northeast India,

cultivation of Khasi mandarin (*Citrus reticulata* Blanco) is mainly limited to the mid-hills, up to an elevation of 1200 meters above mean sea level, in a humid tropical climate Soil orders such as Alfisol, Oxisol, Ultisol, Entisol, and Inceptisol constitute the maximum volume of production harvested globally [7–12]. As a result, orchards continue to generate below-optimal yields as the gap between the amounts of nutrients given and annual requirement widens with orchard age. The threat of the problem has been intensified by the growth of citrus orchards on steep slopes without contour trench planting or terracing, exposing the comparably more acidic and barren sub-surface with low nutrient reserve to sustain the required nutrition of plants [1, 13–17]. Leaf and soil-based nutrient standards have proven to be superior to other diagnostic procedures among the many diagnostic tools [18–22].

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LEAF ANALYSIS

Leaf analysis, according to [23–28] is based on four basic assumptions viz., (i) leaf is the leading

site for the plant metabolism, (ii) change in the nutrient supply is reflected in the composition of leaf, (iii) change is more pronounced at certain stages of development, and (iv) concentration of nutrient in the leaf at a specific growth stage is related to crop performance. The distribution pattern of nutrients, e.g., B, tends to accumulate in mid-rib and interveinal areas of the leaf compared to leaf petiole. It isn't easy to get any information about the biochemical requirement of nutrients by the plant using the average values of leaf analysis [29–33]. Therefore, the total reliance on leaf analysis for fertilizer recommendation could be a hazard without field trials to verify the validity of the outcome of constraint diagnosis [34–39].

The use of foliar diagnosis developed rapidly in the USA, where most works were done in the 1940s. Its use later spread to South Africa, then to Israel, and gradually to other citrus-growing countries. A tentative leaf nutrient standard for the first-time using Valencia sweet orange, which was intended for adoption to individual situations and varieties [40–45]. Determination of the quantity of nutrients present in the whole tree provided information on the relative amount and distribution of nutrients, with leaves accumulating the highest concentration. It is common to see that the leaves on the summer growth are more significant than those on spring shoots, reached maturity more quickly [46–50].

General Guidelines

The nutrient concentration in the plant is an integral value of all the factors that have interacted to affect it. The nutrient levels in the leaf are related to the validity of leaf analysis as a tool for controlling mineral nutrition. It provides a detailed picture of the crop's production output and its reliance on the availability of each nutrient. At present, a classical leaf analysis can indicate the quality of effective absorption of nutrients and their distribution to different organs to participate in various metabolic processes [51–54]. However, it must be pointed out that an estimation of the quantitative mineral composition of leaves gives only a static picture. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the critical level concept has served as a foundation for more effective theories.

The nutritional status of citrus trees can be determined using two types of testing viz., diagnostic and predictive testing [55–58]. Diagnostic testing is undertaken to diagnose the causes of poor crop vigor, e.g., patches of poor growth in an otherwise healthy crop, or to confirm a diagnosis based on plant symptoms and soil tests. Predictive (Prognostic) testing is used in the following three ways: (i) analysis of samples collected during the early crop development to predict the likelihood of the nutrient deficiencies appearing before the crop maturity, (ii) analysis of fruits to predict its likely behavior in the storage, and (iii) analysis of seeds to predict the deficiencies in the succeeding crops. Each form of testing may identify latent deficiencies (hidden hunger) that limit crop production while the plants exhibit no obvious deficiency symptoms. The distinction among the above three types of testing is necessary because of the variation in intensity and the pattern of sampling for each testing method.

Period of Sampling

Studies of late [59–63] showed that the leaves initially act as a sink and later as a source with a period in between known as transition across the sink to source happens to be the best time of sampling. Accordingly, the leaf sampling time was suggested as 5–7 months [64, 65] in Nagpur mandarin (*Citrus reticulata* Blanco) and 3–5 months in acid lime (*Citrus aurantifolia* Swingle) using non-fruiting terminals under hot sub-humid tropical climate of central India.

The selection of leaf from the non-fruiting instead fruiting terminals has the following advantages:

- Sampling is much faster due to the more excellent representation of non-fruiting terminals.
- Using fruits as an aid, the leaf age is not wholly reliable, as the same may develop on older twigs that could facilitate erroneous sampling.

- Leaves from fruiting terminals generally have lower nutrient concentrations except Ca and Mg than those from non-fruiting terminals. Subsequently, other studies showed a higher concentration of nutrients in non-fruiting than fruiting terminals of Kinnow mandarin [66–68].
- These terminals are likely to bear the next season's fruits.

Leaf Nutrient Diagnostics

A comprehensive survey of 108 Khasi mandarin orchards was conducted in northeast India's humid tropical climate from 52 locations across eight states from 2001 to 2004 [69–72]. The significance of leaf analysis as a tool for controlling mineral nutrition is related to its validity; the total concentration in the leaf provides a precise image of the crop's production output and its reliance on nutrient supply. Leaf nutrient concentration (Table 1) like N, P, K, Ca and Mg showed a wide variation, from 2.05–2.35%, 0.09–0.13%, 1.12–2.13%, 1.82–2.42%, and 0.22 to 0.42% respectively. Similarly, the micronutrients Fe, Mn, Cu, and Zn, ranged from 133.5 to 281.2 ppm, 51.6 to 100.3 ppm, 5.1 to 22.4 ppm, and 14.5 to 25.6 ppm, with a median of 138.9, 60.2, 8.5, and 25.5, respectively. The concentration of different nutrients in the leaf exhibited a substantial variation when categorized at various yield levels, except Fe and Mn (Table 2). Earlier studies [73, 74] used Nagpur mandarin (*Citrus reticulata* Blanco) as a test crop grown on Ca-rich alkaline montmorillonitic black clay soils under hot sub-humid tropical climate in central India showed a similar kind of delineation of nutrient levels having a statistically significant difference concerning fruit yield. Fruit yield was more strongly correlated with nutrients such as N ($r = 0.708$, $p = 0.01$), P ($r = 0.697$, $p = 0.01$), Ca ($r = 0.817$, $p = 0.01$), Cu ($r = 0.519$, $p = 0.01$), and Zn ($r = 0.793$, $p = 0.01$) than K ($r = 0.436$, $p = 0.01$), Fe ($r = -0.309$, $p = 0.05$), and Mn ($r = -0.296$, $p = 0.05$).

Table 1. Leaf nutrient status of in citrus orchards across 8 states of east-northeast India (Pooled values for n=108)

States	Leaf nutrient concentration (%)								
	Macronutrients (%)					Micronutrients (ppm)			
	N	P	K	Ca	Mg	Fe	Mn	Cu	Zn
1. Meghalaya (13)	2.35	0.12	1.28	2.14	0.24	148.2	51.6	5.8	20.4
2. Assam (4)	2.31	0.13	1.12	2.22	0.28	155.0	62.0	5.1	22.2
3. Arunachal Pradesh (6)	2.17	0.09	1.42	2.01	0.22	156.3	51.6	7.0	22.8
4. West Bengal (6)	2.28	0.10	1.45	1.92	0.32	144.2	58.5	8.1	24.3
5. Sikkim (3)	2.05	0.09	2.13	2.38	0.42	133.5	100.3	7.4	24.2
6. Manipur (4)	2.17	0.09	1.97	2.42	0.38	153.3	70.9	5.7	14.5
7. Mizoram (7)	2.16	0.10	1.73	1.82	0.32	150.1	72.9	22.4	25.6
8. Tripura (9)	2.11	0.09	2.03	1.94	0.29	281.2	83.5	15.3	22.2
Mean	2.20	0.09	1.64	2.11	0.31	165.2	68.9	9.6	22.0
Median	2.47	0.11	1.43	1.98	0.34	138.9	60.2	8.5	25.5

Figures in parenthesis indicate the number of locations in each state.

Source: [69]

Table 2. Leaf nutrient indices concerning varying levels of fruit yield

Nutrient	Levels of fruit yield (kg tree ⁻¹)				LSD (p=0.05)
	< 15 (n = 18)	15-30 (n=26)	30-45 (n=30)	45-60 (n=34)	
N (%)	1.62c	2.12b	2.56a	2.63a	0.23
P (%)	0.06c	0.10b	0.14a	0.15a	0.03
K (%)	1.62c	1.82b	2.20a	2.14a	0.18
Ca (%)	1.10d	1.83c	2.30b	2.80a	0.42
Mg (%)	0.20c	0.28b	0.38a	0.42a	0.06
Fe (ppm)	242.8a	210.4a	280.8a	262.8a	NS

Mn (ppm)	52.3a	51.4a	46.4a	48.3a	NS
Cu (ppm)	7.8c	6.9c	15.8b	23.9a	4.2
Zn (ppm)	15.1c	21.4b	29.3a	33.8a	5.3

Means in columns by different letters are separated according to LSD test ($P < 0.05$).

Source: [69]

The optimum values of leaf nutrients using multivariate quadratic regression analysis were estimated as: 2.32% N, 0.010% P, 1.92% K, 2.26% Ca, 0.30% Mg, 158.4 ppm Fe, 82.0 ppm Mn, 12.2 ppm Cu, and 30.3 ppm Zn with fruit yield of 46.3 kg tree⁻¹ (Table 3). These values were very similar to the concentrations of various nutrients in leaves obtained from high-performance orchards, implying that maximum yield can be achieved while maintaining the same optimum level of nutrients. For Satsuma mandarin grown in Jeju Island, Korea, [75] suggested optimum leaf N, P, K, Ca, and Mg as 2.5–2.8, 0.19–0.20, 1.5–1.7, 2.5–3.0, and 0.30–0.35 percent, respectively, under similar growing conditions.

While other studies in Japan using clementine mandarin as a test crop, [76] observed optimum values of various nutrients like N, P, K, Ca, and Mg as follows 2.5–2.7%, 0.10–0.15%, 0.80–0.90%, 4.0–5.0%, and 0.25–0.30% respectively. Even if the cultivar is still the same across a range of growing conditions, site-specific conditions, including soil type, dominate the variation in optimum values. These observations call for the necessity of developing the cultivar-specific diagnostic norms to precisely identify nutrient constraints commensuration with field conditions [19–25].

In another study, the DRIS indices projected the optimal value of various nutrients as follows: 1.86–2.62% N, 0.08–0.10% P, 0.89–1.86% K, 1.62–2.12% Ca, 0.40–0.50% Mg, 119.4–219.4 ppm Fe, 58.7–84.7 ppm Mn, 2.2–3.3 ppm Cu, and 20.8–29.8 ppm Zn to fruit yield of 28.2–49.6 kg tree⁻¹ for Khasi mandarins grown in Manipur (Table 4) [77]. Through leaf analysis, various nutrients were rated as

Zn,

Table 3. Comparison of optimum values of leaf nutrient concentration versus values from high-performance orchards

Nutrients	High performance orchards (Range)	Optimum values*
N (%)	2.23–2.49	2.32
P (%)	0.10–0.11	0.10
K (%)	1.86–2.12	1.92
Ca (%)	2.12–2.32	2.26
Mg (%)	0.28–0.38	0.30
Fe (ppm)	148.2–179.8	158.4
Mn (ppm)	72.2–84.8	82.0
Cu (ppm)	10.4–18.6	12.2
Zn (ppm)	24.2–38.8	30.3
Fruit yield (kg tree ⁻¹)	45.0–62.0	46.3

* Optimum values were determined through multivariate quadratic regression equation:
 $Y(\text{Yield}) = 687.62 + 6.12x_1(N) + 22.12x_2(P) + 4.32x_3(K) + 11.12x_4(Ca) + 9.21x_5(Mg) + 0.02x_6(Fe) + 42.89x_7(Mn) + 189.62x_8(Cu) + 82.68x_9(Zn) - 182.11x_1^2 - 5001.10x_2^2 - 42.11x_3^2 - 812.32x_4^2 - 318.21x_5^2 - 0.12x_6^2 - 0.41x_7^2 - 28.19x_8^2 - 3.11x_9^2$

Source: [69]

Table 4. Leaf nutrient indices (derived from DRIS based analysis) for Khasi mandarin grown in Manipur

Nutrient	Indices							
	Deficient	Low		Optimum		High		Excess
N (%)	< 1.52	1.52	- 1.85	1.86	- 2.62	2.63	- 2.92	> 2.92
P (%)	< 0.05	0.05	- 0.07	0.80	- 0.10	0.11	- 0.12	> 0.12
K (%)	< 0.56	0.56	- 0.88	0.89	- 1.86	1.87	- 2.28	> 2.28
Ca (%)	< 1.48	1.48	- 1.61	1.62	- 2.12	2.13	- 2.48	> 2.48

Mg (%)	< 0.28	0.28	- 0.39	0.40	- 0.50	0.51	- 0.62	> 0.62
Fe (ppm)	< 81.4	81.4	- 119.3	119.4	- 219.4	219.5	- 320.3	> 320.3
Mn (ppm)	< 36.3	36.3	- 58.6	58.7	- 84.7	84.8	- 118.2	> 118.2
Cu (ppm)	< 1.1	1.1	- 2.1	2.2	- 3.3	3.4	- 4.8	> 4.8
Zn (ppm)	< 11.2	11.2	- 20.7	20.8	- 29.8	29.9	- 37.8	> 37.8
Yield (kg/tree)	< 12.7	12.7	- 28.1	28.2	- 49.6	49.7	- 58.9	> 58.9

Source: [77]

Table 5. Identifying nutrient constraints in Khasi mandarin using leaf analysis-based (Diagnosis and recommendation integrated system) analysis

	Nutrient found deficient and low (n=30)						Nutrients found high and excess (n=10)		
	Zn	P	Ca	Mg	N	K	Fe	Mn	Cu
Concentration† (mg/kg)	14.2	0.05	1.47	0.28	1.58	0.72	220.4	110.4	3.4
DRIS indices	-160	-140	-110	-100	-60	-40	+110	+210	290

Source: [77]

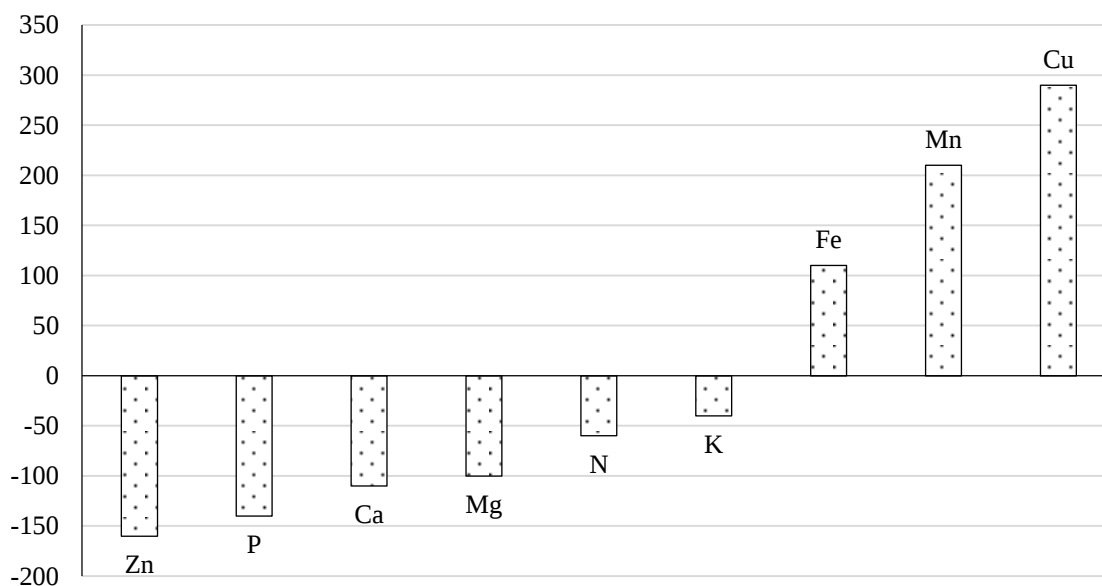


Figure 1. Identifying nutrient constraints in Khasi mandarin using leaf analysis-based DRIS analysis. (Source: [77])

P, Ca, Mg, N, K, Fe, Mn, Cu, in order of decreasing influence on yield (Table 5). Nutrient deficiencies of Zn, P, Ca, Mg, N, and K due to their negative values in decreasing order were observed through leaf analysis. Using the progressive nutrient diagnosis, if the first limiting factor Zn is corrected by its supply, the next nutrient that will limit the yield is P. Further, if Zn and P are satisfied, the next limiting nutrient is Ca, and Mg followed by N and K (Figure 1).

CONCLUSION

In the light of the preceding discussion, the best possible nutrient management strategy particular to a site is the identification of high-yielding orchards in a given location and then using the soil and leaf analysis values as reference guidelines to arrive at the type of nutrient constraint(s). An attempt would overcome fertilization's frequently inconsistent response due to regional differences in soil fertility and plant nutritional problems.

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