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THE REAL DIRT ON

Humic Substances

HUMIC SUBSTANCES (HS) ARE THE LEAST UNDERSTOOD component of soil, yet one of the most important materials found in a healthy balanced soil system. While much has been discovered over the last 40 years, scientists who have experience working with HS realize that the more we know the more there is to learn about these versatile materials. Over the past 15 years hydroponic growers have also proven that soluble carbon, in particular humic substances, are a limiting factor in aqueous based cultures and soilless media. Today most gardeners are familiar with HS on some level and have seen the benefits, yet many are still scratching their heads when it comes to understanding the labelling. The focus of this article is not to re-address the qualities and benefits of HS. Instead it is to explore the confusion surrounding analysis, registration issues and misconceptions about humic and fulvic products in general.

Currently, there is considerable buzz about humic and fulvic

acid, which is no surprise to people who have experience using a high quality product. But confusion due to product labelling has many people questioning the humic substance industry.

The way a product is described, guaranteed and marketed is largely governed by state agricultural regulatory departments. Unfortunately, there is no “standardized” analytical method for quantification, and accepted labelling practices often vary greatly from state to state and province to province in Canada. For example, in California and Oregon the term fulvic acid is not allowed to be used on any product label. Instead these state agencies consider fulvic and humic acid the same substance and require that only humic acid be used on labels. This creates analytical challenges and mass confusion for those products that are fulvic isolates, having no measurable humic acid in them.

This might help to explain why some products will guarantee a product as 0.01 per cent and others may be claiming eight