

Salt Build-up



Photo from Iowa State University



Salt damage photo s: Rose Ogutu, Delaware State University

- Salts can build up and damage crops, especially in a hoophouse – no rain, drip irrigation, extra warmth drying out the soil.
- Worse if your soil doesn't drain well, or if you use animal manures (or synthetic fertilizers).
- Limit salt build-up by improving soil drainage, switching to vegetable-based composts and more cover crops.
- Salt is visible as a white crust on the soil. Or test with an electrical conductivity meter.
- Symptoms are like drought-stress – poor seed germination, poor plant growth, brown leaf edges.
- Excess salts can also encourage some pests.

Effects of Salinity on Hoophouse Peppers

From Steve Moore (2003)

High salt: 3.89 dS/m



Medium salt: 2.51 dS/m



Low salt: 0.85 dS/m



Dealing with Salt Build-Up

- If salinity has become a problem, you could do all your winter watering with a hose
- Or remove the plastic for a while and let rainfall solve the problem
- Or wash down the salts by drenching, using sprinklers.
- We use a lawn sprinkler for two hours at each spot and repeat the next day.
- We do this twice a year: in March before transplanting tomatoes, and in early November once we have all the beds in winter crops.

