

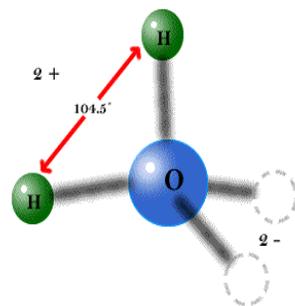
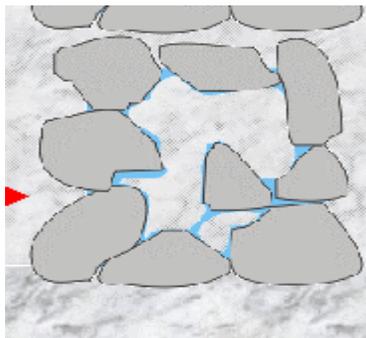
## Retention of Water by Soil

The soils hold water (moisture) due to their colloidal properties and aggregation qualities. The water is held on the surface of the colloids and other particles and in the pores. The forces responsible for retention of water in the soil after the drainage has stopped are due to surface tension and surface attraction and are called surface moisture tension. This refers to the energy concept in moisture retention relationships. The force with which water is held is also termed as suction.

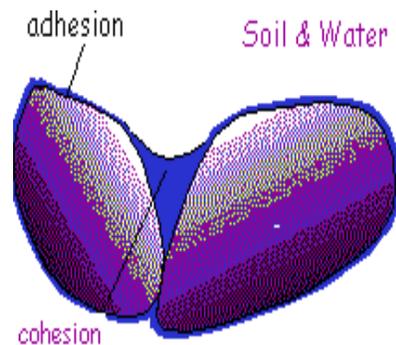
### The water retained in the soil by following ways

**1. Cohesion and adhesion forces:** These two basic forces are responsible for water retention in the soil. One is the attraction of molecules for each other i.e., cohesion. The other is the attraction of water molecules for the solid surface of soil i.e. adhesion. By adhesion, solids (soil) hold water molecules rigidly at their soil - water interfaces. These water molecules in turn hold by cohesion. Together, these forces make it possible for the soil solids to retain water.

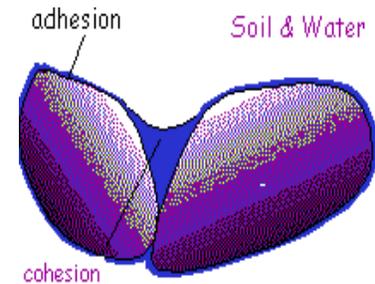
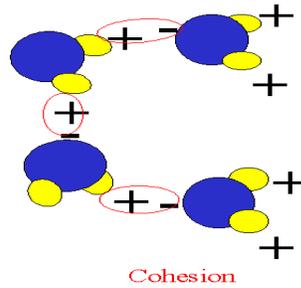
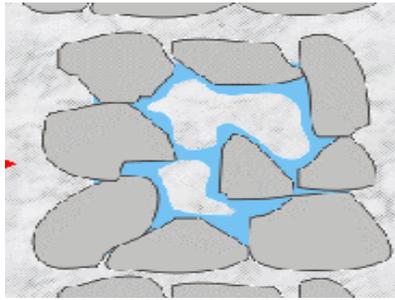
### Adhesion



Ball and stick model of water.



## Cohesion



**2. Surface tension:** This phenomenon is commonly evidenced at water- air interfaces. Water behaves as if its surface is covered with a stretched elastic membrane. At the surface, the attraction of the air for the water molecules is much less than that of water molecules for each other. Consequently, there is a net downward force on the surface molecules, resulting in sort of a compressed film (membrane) at the surface. This phenomenon is called surface tension.

**3. Polarity or dipole character:** The retention of water molecules on the surface of clay micelle is based on the dipole character of the molecule of water. The water molecules are held by electrostatic force that exists on the surface of colloidal particles. By virtue of their dipole character and under the influence of electrostatic forces, the molecules of water get oriented (arranged) on the surface of the clay particles in a particular manner.

Each water molecule carries both negative and positive charges. The clay particle is negatively charged. The positive end of water molecule gets attached to the negatively charged surface of clay and leaving its negative end outward. The water molecules attached to the clay surface in this way present a layer of negative charges to which another layer of oriented water molecules is attached. The number of successive molecular layers goes on increasing as long as the water molecules oriented. As the molecular layer gets thicker, orientation becomes weaker, and at a certain distance from the particle surface the water molecules cease to orientate and capillary water (liquid water) begins to appear. Due to the

forces of adsorption (attraction) exerted by the surface of soil particles, water gets attached on the soil surface. The force of gravity also acts simultaneously, which tries to pull it downwards. The surface force is far greater than the force of gravity so water may remain attached to the soil particle. The water remains attached to the soil particle or move downward into the lower layers, depending on the magnitude of the resultant force.

## Potentials

### Soil water potential:

The retention and movement of water in soils, its uptake and translocation in plants and its loss to the atmosphere are all energy related phenomenon. The more strongly water is held in the soil the greater is the heat (energy) required. In other words, if water is to be removed from a moist soil, work has to be done against adsorptive forces. Conversely, when water is adsorbed by the soil, a negative amount of work is done. The movement is from a zone where the free energy of water is high (standing water table) to one where the free energy is low (a dry soil). This is called soil water energy concept.

### Free energy of soil solids for water is affected by:

**i) Matric (solid) force** i.e., the attraction of the soil solids for water (adsorption) which markedly reduces the free energy (movement) of the adsorbed water molecules.

**ii) Osmotic force** i.e., the attraction of ions and other solutes for water to reduce the free energy of soil solution.

Matric and Osmotic potentials are negative and reduce the free energy level of the soil water. These negative potentials are referred as suction or tension.

**iii) Force of gravity:** This acts on soil water, the attraction is towards the earth's center, which tends to pull the water down ward. This force is always positive. The

difference between the energy states of soil water and pure free water is known as soil water potential. **Total water potential (Pt)** is the sum of the contributions of **gravitational potential (Pg)**, **matric potential (Pm)** and the **Osmotic potential or solute potential (Po)**.

$$P_t = P_g + P_m + P_o$$

Potential represents the difference in free energy levels of pure water and of soil water. The soil water is affected by the force of gravity, presence of soil solid (matric) and of solutes.

### **Soil moisture constants**

Earlier classification divided soil water into gravitational, capillary and hygroscopic water. The hygroscopic and capillary waters are in equilibrium with the soil under given condition. The hygroscopic coefficient and the maximum capillary capacity are the two equilibrium points when the soil contains the maximum amount of hygroscopic and capillary waters, respectively. The amount of water that a soil contains at each of these equilibrium points is known as soil moisture constant.

The soil moisture constant, therefore, represents definite soil moisture relationship and retention of soil moisture in the field.

The three classes of water (gravitational, capillary and hygroscopic) are however very broad and do not represent accurately the soil - water relationships that exists under field conditions.

Though the maximum capillary capacity represents the maximum amount of capillary water that a soil holds, the whole of capillary water is not available for the use of the plants. A part of it, at its lower limit approaching the hygroscopic coefficient is not utilized by the plants. Similarly a part of the capillary water at its upper limit is also not available for the use of plants. Hence two more soil constants, viz., field capacity and wilting coefficient have been introduced to

express the soil-plant-water relationships as it is found to exist under field conditions.

**1. Field capacity:** Assume that water is applied to the surface of a soil. With the downward movement of water all macro and micro pores are filled up. The soil is said to be saturated with respect to water and is at maximum water holding capacity or maximum retentive capacity. It is the amount of water held in the soil when all pores are filled. Sometimes, after application of water in the soil all the gravitational water is drained away, and then the wet soil is almost uniformly moist. The amount of water held by the soil at this stage is known as the field capacity or normal moisture capacity of that soil. **It is the capacity of the soil to retain water against the downward pull of the force of gravity. At this stage only micropores or capillary pores are filled with water and plants absorb water for their use. At field capacity water is held with a force of 1/3 atmosphere. Water at field capacity is readily available to plants and microorganism.**

**2. Wilting coefficient:** As the moisture content falls, a point is reached when the water is so firmly held by the soil particles that plant roots are unable to draw it. The plant begins to wilt. At this stage even if the plant is kept in a saturated atmosphere it does not regain its turgidity and wilts unless water is applied to the soil. The stage at which this occurs is termed the Wilting point and the percentage amount of water held by the soil at this stage is known as the Wilting Coefficient. It represents the point at which the soil is unable to supply water to the plant. Water at wilting coefficient is held with a force of 15 atmosphere.

**3. Hygroscopic coefficient:** The hygroscopic coefficient is the maximum amount of hygroscopic water absorbed by 100 g of dry soil under standard conditions of humidity (50% relative humidity) and temperature (15°C). This tension is equal to

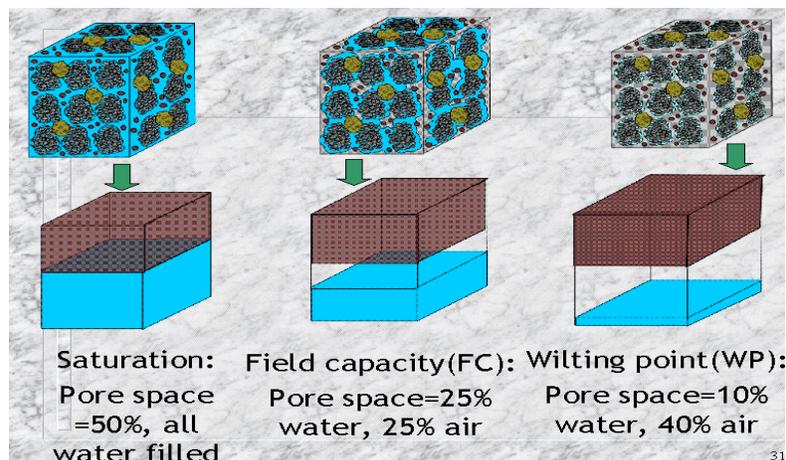
a force of 31 atmospheres. Water at this tension is not available to plant but may be available to certain bacteria.

**4. Available water capacity:** The amount of water required to apply to a soil at the wilting point to reach the field capacity is called the "available" water. The water supplying power of soils is related to the amount of available water a soil can hold. The available water is the difference in the amount of water at field capacity (- 0.3 bar) and the amount of water at the permanent wilting point (- 15 bars).

**5. Maximum water holding capacity:** It is also known as maximum retentive capacity. It is the amount of moisture in a soil when its pore spaces both micro and macro capillary are completely filled with water. It is a rough measure of total pore space of soil. Soil moisture tension is very low between  $1/100^{\text{th}}$  to  $1/1000^{\text{th}}$  of an atmosphere or pF 1 to 0.

**6. Sticky point moisture:** It represents the moisture content of soil at which it no longer sticks to a foreign object. The sticky point represents the maximum moisture content at which a soil remains friable. Sticky point moisture values vary nearly approximate to the moisture equivalent of soils. Summary of the soil moisture constants, type of water and force with which it held is given in following table.

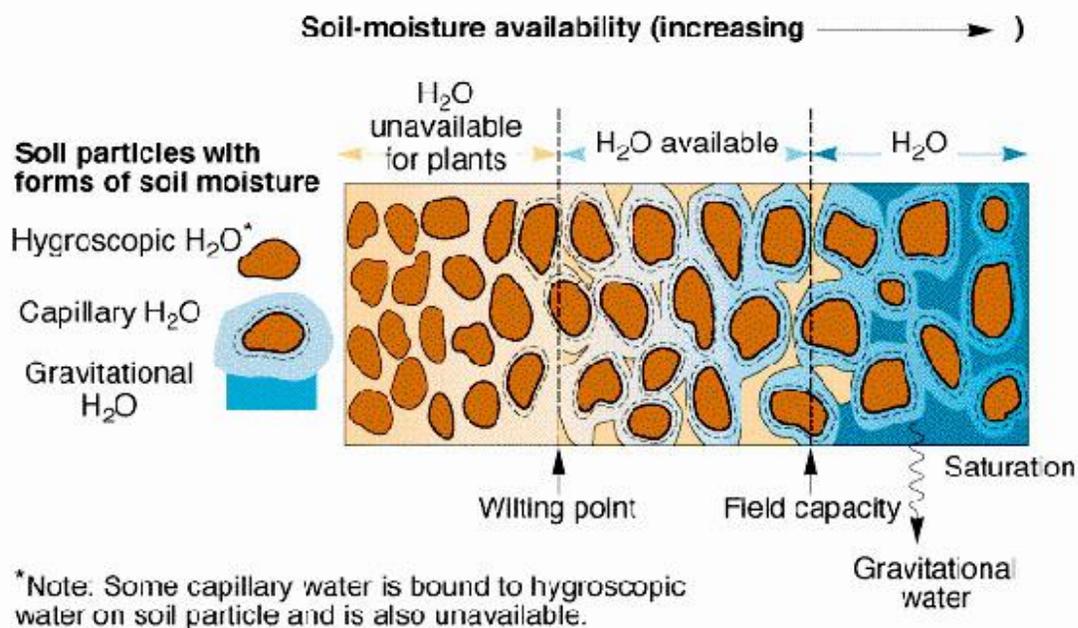
### Soil water capacity



**Moisture equivalent :** It is defined as the percentage of water held by one centimeter thick moist layer of soil subjected to a centrifugal force of 1000 times of gravity for half an hour.

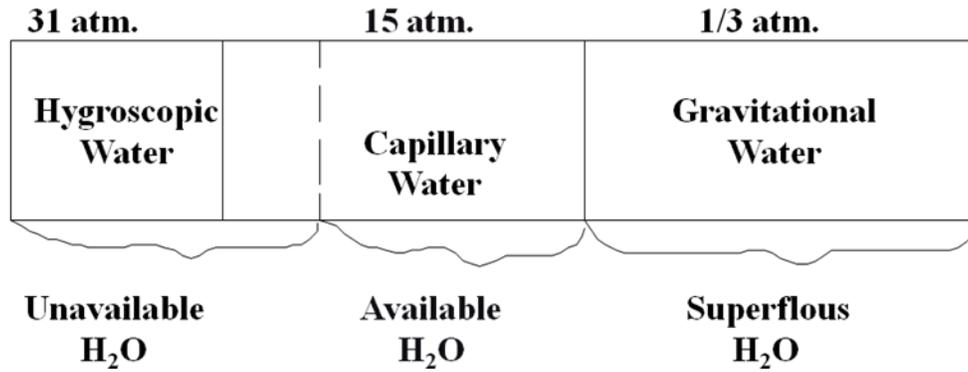
### Soil moisture constants and range of tension and pF

S.No.	Moisture class	Tension (atm)	pF
1	Chemically combined	Very high	---
2	Water vapour	Held at saturation point in the soil air	---
3	Hygroscopic	31 to 10,000	4.50 to 7.00
4	Hygroscopic coefficient	31	4.50
5	Wilting point	15	4.20
6	Capillary	1/3 to 31	2.54 to 4.50
	Moisture equivalent	1/3 to 1	2.70 to 3.00
	Field capacity	1/3	2.54
	Sticky point	1/3 (more or less)	2.54
	Gravitational	Zero or less than 1/3	<2.54
	Maximum water holding capacity	Almost zero	---



## Relationship between soil moisture and tension

Hygroscopic coef.    Wilting coef.    Field capacity



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