

## **Unit A:** Basic Principles of Plant Science with a focus on Field Crops

### **Lesson 2:** Understanding Root Anatomy

**Student Learning Objectives:** Instruction in this lesson should result in students achieving the following objectives:

1. List the functions of roots in plants.
2. Identify the parts of a root.
3. Identify the two major types of root systems.
4. Recognize a healthy root system.

**Recommended Teaching Time:** 1 hour

**Recommended Resources:** The following resources may be useful in teaching this lesson:

- A PowerPoint has also been developed with use of this lesson plan

### **List of Equipment, Tools, Supplies, and Facilities**

Writing surface  
Projector  
PowerPoint slides  
Transparency Masters  
Copies of student lab sheet  
Small, rootbound plant(s) from your area  
Magnifying Lens  
Pencils and paper for students

**Terms.** The following terms are presented in this lesson (shown in bold italics and on PowerPoint Slide #2):

- Apical meristem
- Epidermis
- Fibrous root system
- Primary root
- Root cap
- Root hairs
- Secondary roots
- Taproot system

**Interest Approach.** Use an interest approach that will prepare the students for the lesson. Teachers often develop approaches for their unique class and student situations. A possible approach is included here.

Begin the lesson by taking a plant which has been growing for several weeks in a small container (and is rootbound) out of its pot.

Ask students to make observations about what they see with the naked eye. Start a discussion by asking questions such as: How is the soil being held in place? What can you see in the soil and on the roots? If you have enough plants, break the students into groups and give each group a plant to take out and observe.

Use magnifying lenses to observe roots closely. You may ask students to draw a picture of what they see. Ask students why the roots are so hairy.

**\*\* Use this activity to lead into a discussion over roots.**

## Summary of Content and Teaching Strategies

**\*\* Before giving the students the information on Objective 1, ask them to recall some of the functions that roots have. Based on the student's response, you will see how well they have retained the information from the previous lesson. Then proceed with Objective 1. If the students already know the information continue to ask the students questions about root function as a review.**

**Objective 1:** List the functions of roots in plants.

**(PowerPoint Slide # 3)**

I. Root Function

- A. A plant's health is very closely tied to its roots. When roots are weak or diseased, the whole plant has difficulties. The roots need to be constantly growing in order to stay healthy. This is one reason that a plant growing in one pot for a long time tends to become rootbound.

**(PowerPoint Slide # 4)**

The following are functions of the root system.

1. The roots must absorb all of the water and minerals that a plant needs to live.
2. The root must anchor the plant to the ground and support the above ground part of the plant.
3. The roots store food that has been made through photosynthesis. This food can be used later when a plant needs it to grow or survive.

**\*\*TM: 2-1 can be used to highlight the information for the students. Have them repeat this information aloud as a class. Do this a few times until every student is participating and they are all speaking the words together**

## **Objective 2:** Identify the parts of a root.

### **(PowerPoint Slide # 5)**

- II. When a plant seed germinates, the first structure to emerge from the seed is a root.
  - A. This root becomes the **primary root** and on some plants the most important root in the whole root system.
  - B. Other roots eventually branch out from the primary root. These are called **secondary roots**.

### **(PowerPoint Slide # 6)**

- C. At the tip of the root, there is an area where new cells develop, called the **apical meristem**. The apical meristem is easily damaged and so it has a **root cap** over the top of it to protect it from damage as it grows through the large and sometimes coarse soil particles.

### **(PowerPoint Slide # 7)**

- D. The surface of the root is covered with a skin of cells called the **epidermis**. This epidermis is where the water and minerals enter the root through osmosis and diffusion. The larger the surface area of the epidermis, the better able the plant is to bring in water and minerals. So, the epidermis cells begin to elongate and grow hairlike projections. These projections, called **root hairs**, greatly increase the surface area of the root and allow much more water and minerals to enter the plant.

**\*\* Use TM 2-2 to show a diagram of the root parts to the students. Have them draw these in their notebooks and label them as well. You can also show the picture on PowerPoint slide # 8. Tell the students to look over this drawing.**

**If you draw this picture on the board, erase the parts that you have labeled. Have the student put their notes away. See if the students can label the parts. As a review ask why each root part is important.**

## **Objective 3:** Identify the two major types of root systems.

**\*\* This objective can also be used as a review of previous material. Ask the students if they can recall the two major types of root systems. Go through the information again to reinforce key points.**

### **(PowerPoint Slide # 9)**

III. Plants root systems are organized in two basic ways. The two ways have a lot to do with primary and secondary roots.

- A. A root system which is composed of one main primary root and many secondary roots branching off of the primary root is called a ***taproot system***. (PowerPoint Slide # 10 provides pictures of taproots)

### **(PowerPoint Slide # 11)**

- B. A system which has no dominant primary root but is made of many primary and secondary roots of similar size is called a ***fibrous root system***.

**\*\*Plants with both types of root systems can be shown to the students. You can bring in pictures of different plant roots. Have the students see if they can name the plant you are showing. Also have them classify the type of root system it has.**

## **Objective 4:** Recognize a healthy root system.

### **(PowerPoint Slide # 12)**

IV. Healthy root appearance and maintenance

- A. A healthy root system is white or nearly white in color and smells fresh. If roots are black, brown, or dark orange and smell rotten or sour, the root system is having some problems. Although a plant growing outside has a majority of roots in only the top two feet of soil, a plant in a pot should have its roots evenly dispersed throughout the soil in the pot.

### **(PowerPoint Slide # 13)**

- B. Watering a plant properly is one of the most important ways to keep the root system healthy. Proper watering for most plants involves growing the plants in pots with proper drainage holes in the bottom of the pot. The pot is soaked with water until it is dripping out of the drainage holes. This encourages roots to grow through the entire pot. The plant's soil is usually allowed to dry slightly before watering again. If plants have adequate drainage, over-watering of plants is not a matter of *how much* water, but of *how often* watering occurs.

**\*\*To help the class understand the characteristics of a healthy root, you could do a demonstration. Get two plants of the same species. One will be over watered and the other will be watered correctly. Each class period, look at the roots. Have the students write down their observations in their notebooks. (Make sure to plant the plant specimen back when you are finished with the observations.) After a few days when you get the desired results, lead the class into discussion. Have them expand on the things that can be done to keep a root system healthy.**

**Review/Summary:** Students will complete a lab to review the lesson. The teacher will need to break the students into groups. The number of people in each group will depend on how many plant specimens are available. Each student will go to their assigned plant. They will need to complete the lab using LS: 2-1. When they are finished, they can consult with their group members and compare their answers. If they disagree on their answers, they need to work as a group to come up with a common answer.

When all groups are finished, the oldest person in each group will share their answers to the entire class. When each group has presented, ask if there are any questions. Re-teach any information that the students are having trouble with.

There are also some review questions that can be used on PowerPoint slide #14 and #15.

**Application.** Use LS: 2-1 to help students apply their knowledge of the objectives.

**Evaluation.** Evaluation should be based on student comprehension of the learning objectives. This can be determined using the attached sample written test.

## **Answers to Sample Test:**

### ***Part One: Matching***

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. a

### ***Part Two: Completion***

primary root  
taproot system

fibrous root system  
secondary root

***Part Three: Short Answer***

1. a) Roots should be white.  
b) Roots should smell fresh.  
c) Roots should be evenly dispersed throughout soil.
  
2. a) Storage of food  
b) Absorption of water and minerals  
c) Anchorage and/or support of the plant

## Sample Test

Name\_\_\_\_\_

# Test

### Unit A Lesson 2: Understanding Root Anatomy

#### **Part One: Matching**

*Instructions.* Match the term with the correct response. Write the letter of the term by the definition.

- |                    |              |
|--------------------|--------------|
| a. apical meristem | c. root cap  |
| b. epidermis       | d. root hair |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Cells that make up the skin of the root.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. These increase the surface area of the root.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. This protects the tip of the root.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. This is where new cells divide in the root.

#### **Part Two: Completion**

*Instructions.* Provide the word or words to complete the following statements.

1. The first root to come out of a seed is called the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. A root system which has one large primary root and many secondary roots branching from that root is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. A root system in which all of the roots are about the same size is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The root which branches off of a primary root is called a \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **Part Three: Short Answer**

*Instructions.* Provide information to answer the following questions.

1. Name three characteristics of a healthy root system.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
2. Name three functions of roots.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

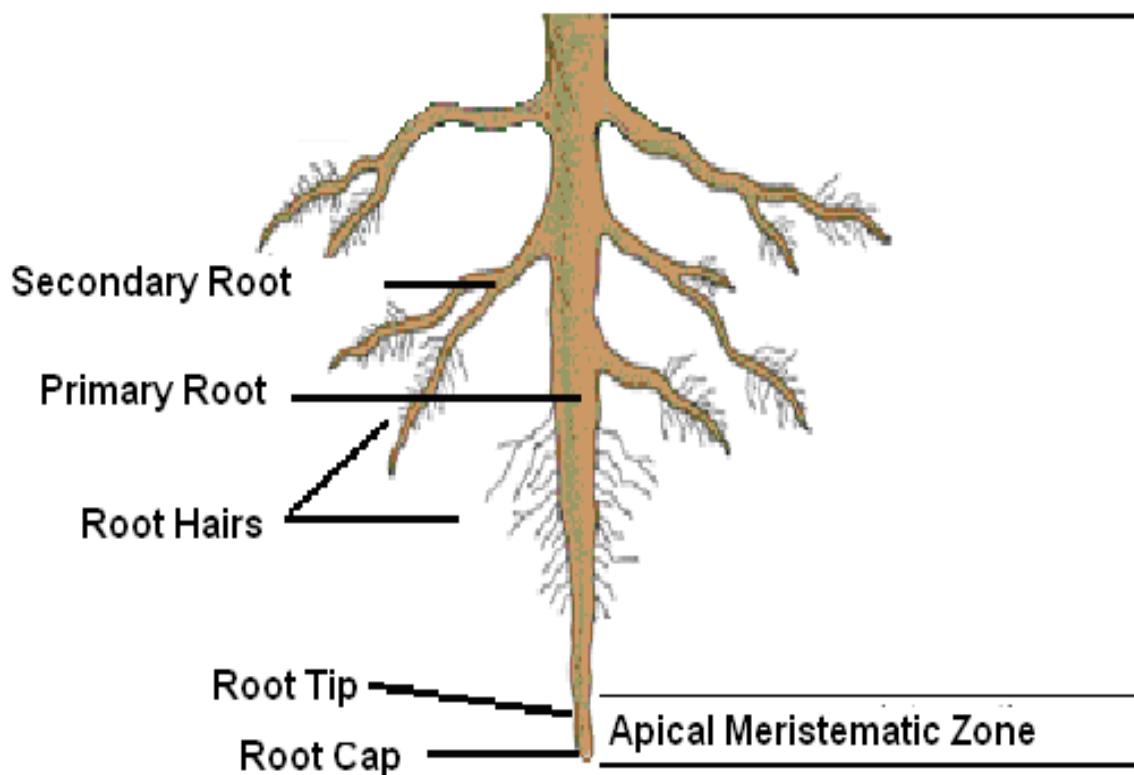
TM: 2-1

## **FUNCTION OF ROOTS**

- **Absorption of Water and Minerals**
- **Anchor plant to the ground**
- **Storage of food**

TM: 2-2

## Root Structure



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## Lab Sheet

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1. Given a plant, draw a picture of a plant's root magnified by a stereoscopic microscope or a hand lens. Label the root cap and the root hairs.

2. Is this a fibrous or a taproot system?

3. Do the primary and secondary roots look the same or different?

4. Would you say that this plant has a healthy root system or an unhealthy one? Why?

5. What would you recommend for improving the health of this root system?