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**Influence of soil water management on plant growth, essential oil yield and oil composition of rose-scented geranium (*Pelargonium* spp.)**

**by**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	xv
ABSTRACT.....	xvi
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
2.1 ESSENTIAL OILS.....	5
2.1.1 Nature and composition of essential oils.....	5
2.1.2 Importance of essential oils to the host plant.....	6
2.1.3 Role of essential oils in history and at present.....	7
2.2 ROSE-SCENTED GERANIUM ( <i>PELARGONIUM SPECIES</i> ).....	9
2.2.1 Botany and origin.....	9
2.2.2 Uses of geranium oil.....	10
2.2.3 History of <i>Pelargonium</i> species cultivation for oil production.....	11
2.2.4 Geranium oil yield and composition.....	11
2.3 IRRIGATION.....	18
2.3.1 History of irrigation.....	18



2.3.2	Contribution of irrigated agriculture.....	19	
2.3.3	Freshwater scarcity.....	20	
2.3.4	Coping with freshwater scarcity in agriculture.....	21	
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>			
<b>GROWTH, ESSENTIAL OIL YIELD AND OIL COMPOSITION OF ROSE-SCENTED GERANIUM GROWN AT DIFFERENT MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE SOIL WATER DEPLETION LEVELS.....</b>			<b>25</b>
3.1	ABSTRACT.....	25	
3.2	INTRODUCTION.....	26	
3.3	MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	28	
3.3.1	Study area and duration.....	28	
3.3.2	Plant culture.....	28	
3.3.3	Field layout and treatments.....	29	
3.3.4	Irrigation monitoring.....	30	
3.3.5	Agronomic practices.....	33	
3.3.6	Data recorded.....	33	
3.4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	35	
3.4.1	Soil water depletion patterns.....	35	
3.4.2	Plant growth parameters.....	41	
3.4.3	Essential oil yield and quality parameters.....	47	
3.4.4	Water use and water-use efficiency.....	50	
3.5	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	53	



## CHAPTER 4

<b>RESPONSE OF ROSE-SCENTED GERANIM GROWTH, ESSENTIAL OIL YIELD AND OIL COMPOSITION TO A ONE-MONTH IRRIGATION-WITHOLDING PERIOD.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>4.1 ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>4.2 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>4.3 MATERIALS AND METHODS.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>4.3.1 Site description.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>4.3.2 Plant culture.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>4.3.3 Field layout and treatments.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>4.3.4 Irrigation monitoring.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>4.3.5 Agronomic practices.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>4.3.6 Data recorded.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>4.4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>4.4.1 Soil water content during the irrigation-withholding periods.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>4.4.2 Herbage growth parameters.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.4.3 Essential oil yield and quality parameters.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>4.4.4 Water use and water use-efficiency (WUE).....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>4.5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>76</b>



## CHAPTER 5

### RESPONSE OF ROSE-SCENTED GERANIUM GROWTH, ESSENTIAL OIL YIELD AND OIL COMPOSITION TO IRRIGATION FREQUENCY AND A TERMINAL ONE-WEEK WATER-WITHHOLDING PERIOD.....

5.1 ABSTRACT.....	77
5.2 INTRODUCTION.....	78
5.3 MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	79
5.3.1 Growth system description.....	79
5.3.2 Plant culture.....	79
5.3.3 Treatments and experimental design.....	80
5.3.4 Irrigation monitoring.....	81
5.3.5 Fertiliser application.....	82
5.3.6 Data recorded.....	82
5.4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	83
5.4.1 Effects of irrigation frequency on herbage yield in the tunnel trials.....	83
5.4.2 Effects of irrigation frequency on essential oil yield components in the tunnel trials.....	84
5.4.3 Effects of irrigation frequency and withholding irrigation on herbage yield parameters in the tunnel trials.....	86
5.4.4 Response of essential oil yield parameters to irrigation frequency, growing medium and withholding irrigation in the tunnel trials.....	88
5.4.5 Response of herbage yield parameters to irrigation levels in the glasshouse trials.....	91
5.4.6 Response of essential oil yield parameters to irrigation levels in the glasshouse trials.....	92
5.4.7 Water use and water-use efficiency (WUE).....	95



<b>5.5 CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
<b>RESPONSE OF ROSE-SCENTED GERANIUM LEAF PHYSIOLOGY AND MORPHOLOGY TO IRRIGATION FREQUENCY.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>6.1 ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>6.2 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>6.3 MATERIALS AND METHODS.....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>6.3.1 Data recorded.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>6.4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>6.4.1 Leaf physiological response to water stress.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>6.4.2 Leaf morphological response to water stress.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>6.5 CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	
<b>GENERAL DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	
<b>SOIL AND WEATHER DATA FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL SITES.....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	
<b>NEUTRON PROBE CALIBRATION PROCESSES.....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	
<b>SUMMARISED ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA) TABLES.....</b>	<b>155</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
<b>Table 3.1: Regression equations used to determine soil water content.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Table 3.2: Days of regrowth cycle and amount of irrigation applied to the different maximum allowable soil water depletion treatments in the open field.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Table 3.3: Days of regrowth cycle and amount of irrigation applied to the different maximum allowable soil water depletion treatments in the rain shelter.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Table 3.4: Percentage available soil water depleted and amount of irrigation applied (mm) per soil layer for the different maximum allowable soil water depletion levels.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Table 3.5: Leaf area index of rose-scented geranium grown under different maximum allowable depletion levels (MAD) of plant available soil water for the final harvests.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Table 3.6: Fresh leaf mass ratio (as a percentage of total fresh herbage mass) for rose-scented geranium grown at different maximum allowable depletion levels (MAD) of plant available soil water recorded at final harvests.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Table 3.7: Leaf and stem dry matter contents (%) of rose-scented geranium grown at different maximum allowable depletion levels (MAD) of plant available soil water recorded at final harvests.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Table 3.8: Average water use and water-use efficiency (expressed on essential oil yield and herbage dry mass basis) of rose-scented geranium grown at different maximum allowable depletion levels of plant available soil water.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Table 4.1: Maximum LAI of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.....</b>	<b>63</b>



<b>Table 4.2: Dry matter content (percentage) of rose-scented geranium grown under one-month at different regrowth stages.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Table 4.3: Fresh leaf mass to total fresh biomass ratio (%) of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one-month at different regrowth stages.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Table 4.4: Total irrigation applied and amount of water used by rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed at different regrowth stages.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Table 5.1: Fresh herbage yield of rose-scented geranium grown under different irrigation frequencies in the tunnel.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Table 5.2: Essential oil yield of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequency in the tunnel.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Table 5.3: Water use and water-use efficiency (on essential oil yield basis) of rose-scented geranium grown under different irrigation frequencies and a one-week irrigation-withholding period.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Table 6.1: Non-glandular trichome and stomatal density from leaves of rose-scented geranium grown under different irrigation frequencies.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Table 6.2: Glandular trichome density on the abaxial and adaxial surfaces of rose-scented geranium leaves.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Table 6.3: Response of petiole and leaf length to irrigation frequency.....</b>	<b>116</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
<b>Figure 3.1:</b> Temporal variations in plant available soil water (ASW) content in the layers of the root zone of rose-scented geranium in the open-field trial.....	38
<b>Figure 3.2:</b> Temporal variations in plant available soil water (ASW) content in the layers of the root zone of rose-scented geranium in the rain-shelter trial.....	39
<b>Figure 3.3:</b> Leaf area index of rose-scented geranium as affected by different maximum allowable depletion (MAD) levels of plant available soil water.....	41
<b>Figure 3.4:</b> Herbage dry mass of rose-scented geranium grown at different maximum allowable depletion (MAD) levels of plant available soil water.....	44
<b>Figure 3.5:</b> Fresh herbage yield of rose-scented geranium grown at different maximum allowable depletion (MAD) levels of plant available soil water.....	46
<b>Figure 3.6:</b> Essential oil content of rose-scented geranium grown at different maximum allowable depletion (MAD) levels of plant available soil water.....	47
<b>Figure 3.7:</b> Essential oil yield of rose-scented geranium grown at different maximum allowable depletion (MAD) levels of plant available soil water.....	48
<b>Figure 3.8:</b> Major essential oil components (percentage of essential oil yield) of rose-scented geranium grown under different maximum allowable depletion levels of plant available soil water.....	50

<b>Figure 4.1:</b> Available soil water content per soil layer in the root zone of rose-scented geranium during the one-month irrigation-withholding periods.....	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 4.2:</b> Leaf area index growth trends of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.....	<b>62</b>
<b>Figure 4.3:</b> Dry matter accumulation of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.....	<b>64</b>
<b>Figure 4.4:</b> Fresh herbage yield of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.....	<b>66</b>
<b>Figure 4.5:</b> Essential oil content (% oil on fresh herbage mass basis) of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.....	<b>69</b>
<b>Figure 4.6:</b> Essential oil yield (kg/ha) of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.....	<b>70</b>
<b>Figure 4.7:</b> Essential oil composition of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.....	<b>72</b>
<b>Figure 4.8:</b> Water-use efficiency (WUE) (kg/ha/mm) of rose-scented geranium that was water-stressed for one month at different regrowth stages.	<b>75</b>
<b>Figure 5.1:</b> Plant arrangements in the tunnel trial.....	<b>81</b>
<b>Figure 5.2:</b> Drainage-collecting container in the glasshouse pot trials.....	<b>82</b>
<b>Figure 5.3:</b> Essential oil content of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequency in the tunnel.....	<b>85</b>
<b>Figure 5.4:</b> Rose-scented geranium fresh (A) and dry (B) herbage mass as affected by irrigation frequency and a one-week stress period before harvest in the tunnel.....	<b>87</b>
<b>Figure 5.5:</b> Rose-scented geranium oil content (percentage oil on fresh herbage mass basis) as affected by irrigation frequency and a one-week stress period before harvest in two growing media in the tunnel.....	<b>88</b>

<b>Figure 5.6:</b> Essential oil yield of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequency, a one-week stress period before harvest and growing media in the tunnel.....	<b>89</b>
<b>Figure 5.7:</b> Chemical composition (%) of essential oil of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequencies and a one-week stress period in the tunnel.....	<b>90</b>
<b>Figure 5.8:</b> Fresh (A) and dry (B) herbage mass of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequency and a one-week irrigation-withholding period in the glasshouse.....	<b>91</b>
<b>Figure 5.9:</b> Effect of irrigation frequency on essential oil yield of rose-scented geranium in the glasshouse.....	<b>92</b>
<b>Figure 5.10:</b> Essential oil content (percentage oil on fresh herbage mass basis) of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequency and one-week irrigation-withholding treatments.....	<b>93</b>
<b>Figure 5.11:</b> Essential oil yield of rose-scented geranium grown in different irrigation frequencies and a one-week water stress period.....	<b>94</b>
<b>Figure 5.12:</b> Composition (percentage of essential oil) of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequency and irrigation withholding for the week prior to harvesting treatments in the glasshouse.....	<b>95</b>
<b>Figure 6.1:</b> Effect of irrigation frequency on stomatal conductance of rose-scented geranium recorded during a one-week irrigation-withholding period.....	<b>103</b>
<b>Figure 6.2:</b> Effect of irrigation frequency on transpiration rate of rose-scented geranium leaves recorded during a one-week irrigation-withholding period.....	<b>105</b>
<b>Figure 6.3:</b> Rose-scented geranium canopy size as affected by irrigation frequency.....	<b>105</b>
<b>Figure 6.4:</b> Effect of irrigation frequency on relative water content of rose-scented geranium leaves observed during a one-week irrigation-withholding period.....	<b>106</b>

<b>Figure 6.5: After-effect of irrigation frequency on leaf water potential of rose-scented geranium leaves recorded during a one-week irrigation-withholding period.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Figure 6.6: Large (L) and small (S) glandular trichomes on a leaf surface viewed under a scanning electron microscope.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Figure 6.7: Leaf trichomes observed under a light microscope.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Figure 6.8: Morphology of glandular trichomes observed under a scanning electron microscope.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Figure 6.9: Glandular trichomes and stomata in immature leaves (A, B and C) and in mature leaves (D and E).....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Figure 6.10: Effect of irrigation frequency on stomatal opening observed under a scanning electron microscope.....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Figure 6.11: Leaf size of rose-scented geranium as affected by irrigation frequency.....</b>	<b>116</b>



## LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

$A$	Plot area
ASW	Available soil water
cv.	Cultivar
$D$	Water deep percolation
DM	Dry mass
$ET$	Evapotranspiration
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (Rome, Italy)
FM	Fresh mass
GC	Gas chromatography
G:C ratio	Geraniol to citronellol ratio
$G_s$	Stomatal conductance
$H_{LA}$	Harvested land area
$I$	Irrigation water applied
IW:CPE ratio	Irrigation water to cumulative pan evaporation ratio
$l$	Litre
$LAI$	Leaf area index
$LA$ (LA)	Leaf area
MAD	Maximum allowable depletion
$n$	Number of soil layers
$P$	Rainfall (precipitation)
PRD	Partial root zone drying
$R$	Water runoff
$R_A$	Neutron probe reading in air
$R_S$	Neutron probe reading in soil
$R_t$	Transpiration rate
RWC	Relative water content
$R_z$	Plant root zone
SANDA	South African National Department of Agriculture
SFE	Supper fluid extraction
$S_1$	Initial soil water content of a cropping season (regrowth period)
$S_2$	Final soil water content of a cropping season (regrowth period)



THRIP	Technology and Human Resources for Industry Programme (South Africa)
UIDEA	Uganda's Investment in Developing Export Agriculture (Uganda)
$V_I$	Volume of irrigation water
WUE	Water use efficiency
$\theta_d$	Depleted water
$\theta_{FCi}$	Volumetric soil water content at field capacity
$\theta_i$	Measured volumetric soil water content
$\theta_{PWPi}$	Volumetric soil water content at plant permanent wilting point
$\Psi_w$	Water potential

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**ABSTRACT**

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Introducing effective irrigation management in arid and semi-arid regions, like most areas of South Africa, is an indispensable way of maximising crop yield and enhancing productivity of scarce freshwater resources. Holistic improvements in agricultural water management could be realised through integrating the knowledge of crop-specific water requirements. In order to develop effective irrigation schedules for rose-scented geranium (*Pelargonium capitatum* x *P. radens*), greenhouse and field experiments were conducted at the Hatfield Experimental Farm of the University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, from 28 October 2004 to 2006.

Results from 20, 40, 60 and 80% maximum allowable depletion (MAD) levels of the plant available soil water (ASW) indicated that plant roots extracted most of the soil water from the top 40 cm soil layer, independent of the treatment. Both essential oil yield and fresh herbage mass responded positively to high soil water content. Increasing the MAD level to 60% and higher resulted in a significant reduction in herbage mass and essential oil yields. An increase in the degree of water stress apparently increased the essential oil concentration (percentage oil on fresh herbage mass basis), but its contribution to total essential oil yield (kg/ha oil) was limited. There was no significant relationship between MAD level and essential oil composition. For water saving without a significant reduction in essential oil yield of rose-scented geranium, a MAD of 40% of ASW is proposed.



Response of rose-scented geranium to a one-month irrigation withholding period in the second or third month of regrowth cycles showed that herbage mass and oil yield were positively related. Herbage yield was significantly reduced when the water stress period was imposed during the third or fourth month of regrowth. A remarkable essential oil yield loss was observed only when the plants were stressed during the fourth month of regrowth. Essential oil content (% oil on fresh herbage mass basis) was higher in stressed plants, especially when stressed late, but oil yield dropped due to lower herbage mass. The relationship between essential oil composition and irrigation treatments was not consistent. Water-use efficiency was not significantly affected by withholding irrigation in the second or in the third month of regrowth. With a marginal oil yield loss, about 330 to 460 m<sup>3</sup> of water per hectare per regrowth cycle could be saved by withholding irrigation during the third month of regrowth. The overall results highlighted that in water-scarce regions withholding irrigation during either the second or the third month of regrowth in rose-scented geranium could save water that could be used by other sectors of society.

In greenhouse pot experiments, rose-scented geranium was grown under different irrigation frequencies, in two growth media. Irrigation was withheld on 50% of the plants (in each plot) for the week prior to harvesting. Herbage and essential oil yields were better in the sandy clay soil than in silica sand. Essential oil content (% oil on fresh herbage mass basis) apparently increased with a decrease in irrigation frequency. Both herbage and total essential oil yields positively responded to frequent irrigation. A one-week stress period prior to harvesting significantly increased essential oil content and total essential oil yield. Hence, the highest essential oil yield was obtained from a combination of high irrigation frequency and a one-week irrigation-withholding period. In the irrigation frequency treatments, citronellol and citronellyl formate contents tended to increase with an increase in the stress level, but the reverse was true for geraniol and geranyl formate.

Leaf physiological data were recorded during the terminal one-week water stress in the glasshouse pot trial. Upon rewatering, stomatal conductance ( $G_s$ ) and transpiration rate ( $R_t$ ) were significantly lower in the less often irrigated than in the more often irrigated treatments, while leaf water potential ( $\psi_w$ ) and relative water content (RWC) were the same for all plants, indicating that water stress had an after-effect on  $G_s$  and  $R_t$ . At the end of the stress period,  $G_s$ ,  $R_t$ ,

$\psi_w$  and RWC were lower in the plants from the more often irrigated than from the less often irrigated treatments. Irrespective of irrigation treatment, one type of non-glandular and two types (different in shape and size) of glandular trichomes were observed. In water stressed-conditions, stomata and trichome densities increased, while the total number of stomata and trichomes per leaf appeared to remain more or less the same. Water stress conditions resulted in stomatal closure.

**Keywords:** Citronellol; citronellyl formate; essential oil content; geraniol; geranyl formate; herbage yield; irrigation-withholding period; maximum allowable depletion level; relative water content; stomatal conductance; transpiration rate; trichomes; water potential; water stress; water use; water-use efficiency