BRITISH STANDARD

BS 7755-3.7: 1995
ISO 11261: 1995

Soil quality —

Part 3: Chemical methods —

Section 3.7 Determination of total nitrogen — Modified Kjeldahl method

Committees responsible for this British Standard

The preparation of this British Standard was entrusted by Technical Committee EH/4, Soil quality, to Subcommittee EH/4/3, Chemical methods, upon which the following bodies were represented:

Association of Consulting Scientists
Association of Public Analysts
British Ceramic Research Ltd.
British Gas plc
British Society of Soil Science
Department of the Environment (Drinking Water Inspectorate)
Department of Trade and Industry (Laboratory of the Government Chemist)
National Rivers Authority
Royal Society of Chemistry
Society of Chemical Industry
Soil Survey and Land Research Centre
Water Research Centre
Water Services Association of England and Wales

This British Standard, having been prepared under the direction of the Health and Environment Sector Board, was published under the authority of the Standards Board and comes into effect on 15 October 1995

The following BSI references relate to the work on this standard:
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Amendments issued since publication

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Contents

National foreword

This British Standard has been prepared by Subcommittee EH/4/3 and is identical with ISO 11261:1995 *Soil quality – Determination of total nitrogen — Modified Kjeldahl method*, published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

ISO 11263 was prepared by Subcommittee 3, Chemical methods, of Technical Committee ISO/TC 190, Soil quality, with the active participation and approval of the UK.

BS 7755 is being published in a series of Parts subdivided into Sections and Subsections that will generally correspond to particular International Standards. Other Parts of BS 7755 are, or will be, as follows.

— *Part 1: Terminology and classification;*

— *Part 2: Sampling;*

— *Part 3: Chemical methods;*

— *Part 4: Biological methods;*

— *Part 5: Physical methods.*

Cross-references

International Standard	Corresponding British Standard
ISO 3696:1987	BS 3978:1987 *Specification for water for laboratory use* (Identical)
ISO 5725:1986	BS 5497 *Precision of test methods* Part 1:1987 *Guide for the determination of repeatability and reproducibility for a standard test method by inter-laboratory tests* (Identical) BS 7755 *Soil quality*
ISO 11464:1994	Section 3.5:1995 *Pretreatment of samples for physico-chemical analyses* (Identical)
ISO 11465:1993	Section 3.1:1994 *Determination of dry matter and water content on a mass basis by a gravimetric method* (Identical)

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Summary of pages

This document comprises a front cover, an inside front cover, pages i and ii, pages 1 to 4, an inside back cover and a back cover.

This standard has been updated (see copyright date) and may have had amendments incorporated. This will be indicated in the amendment table on the inside front cover.

1 Scope

This International Standard specifies a method for the determination of the total nitrogen (ammonium-N, nitrate-N, nitrite-N and organic N) content of a soil. Nitrogen in N-N-linkages, N-O-linkages and some heterocyclics (especially pyridine) is only partially determined.
This International Standard is applicable to all types of soils.

2 Normative references

The following standards contain provisions which, through reference in this text, constitute provisions of this International Standard. At the time of publication, the editions indicated were valid. All standards are subject to revision, and parties to agreements based on this International Standard are encouraged to investigate the possibility of applying the most recent editions of the standards indicated below. Members of IEC and ISO maintain registers of currently valid International Standards.

ISO 3696:1987, *Water for analytical laboratory use — Specification and test methods.*

ISO 5725:1986, *Precision of test methods — Determination of repeatability and reproducibility for a standard test method by inter-laboratory tests.*

ISO 11464:1994, *Soil quality — Pretreatment of samples for physico-chemical analyses.*

ISO 11465:1993, *Soil quality — Determination of dry matter and water content on a mass basis — Gravimetric method.*

3 Principle

The method is based on the Kjeldahl-digestion, but titanium dioxide (TiO_2) is used as the catalyst instead of selenium.

NOTE 1 Titanium dioxide is ecotoxicologically less harmfull than selenium.

4 Reagents

All reagents shall be of recognized analytical grade. Use water of grade 2 complying with ISO 3696.

4.1 *Salicylic acid/sulfuric acid*

Dissolve 25 g of salicylic acid in 1 litre of concentrated sulfuric acid (ϱ = 1,84 g/cm^3).

4.2 *Potassium sulfate catalyst mixture*

Grind and thoroughly mix 200 g of potassium sulfate, 6 g of copper(II) sulfate pentahydrate and 6 g of titanium dioxide, with the crystal structure of anatase.

4.3 *Sodium thiosulfate pentahydrate*

Crush the crystals to form a powder that passes through a sieve with an aperture of 0,25 mm.

4.4 *Sodium hydroxide, c*(NaOH) = 10 mol/l.

4.5 *Boric acid solution*, $\rho(H_3BO_3)$ = 20 g/l.

4.6 *Mixed indicator*

Dissolve 0,1 g of bromocresol green and 0,02 g of methyl red in 100 ml of ethanol.

4.7 *Sulfuric acid, c*(H^+) = 0,01 mol/l.

5 Apparatus

Usual laboratory equipment and

5.1 *Digestion flasks* or *tubes*, of nominal volume 50 ml, suitable for the digestion stand.

5.2 *Digestion stand*

NOTE 2 Glass tubes placed in holes drilled into an aluminium block are also suitable.

5.3 *Distillation apparatus*, preferably of the Parnas-Wagner type.

5.4 *Burette*, graduated in intervals of 0,01 ml or smaller.

6 Pretreatment of soil samples

Samples shall be pretreated according to ISO 11464.

NOTE 3 Losses of nitrogen can occur with samples of high ammonium-N and nitrate-N content. Therefore, excessive drying (105 °C) should be avoided.

7 Procedure

Place a test portion of the air-dried soil sample, of about 0,2 g (expected nitrogen content ≈ 0,5 %) to 1 g (expected nitrogen content ≈ 0,1 %), in the digestion flask (**5.1**). Add 4 ml of salicylic/sulfuric acid (**4.1**) and swirl the flask until the acid is thoroughly mixed with the soil. Allow the mixture to stand for at least several hours (or overnight). Add 0,5 g of sodium thiosulfate (**4.3**) through a dry funnel with a long stem that reaches down into the bulb of the digestion flask, and heat the mixture cautiously on the digestion stand (**5.2**) until frothing has ceased.

Then cool the flask, add 1,1 g of the catalyst mixture (**4.2**) and heat until the digestion mixture becomes clear. Boil the mixture gently for up to 5 h so that the sulfuric acid condenses about 1/3 of the way up to the neck of the flask. Ensure that the temperature of the solution does not exceed 400 °C.

NOTE 4 In most cases a boiling period of 2 h is sufficient.

After completion of the digestion step, allow the flask to cool and add about 20 ml of water slowly while shaking. Then swirl the flask to bring any insoluble material into suspension and transfer the contents to the distillation apparatus (**5.3**). Rinse three times with water to complete the transfer. Add 5 ml of boric acid (**4.5**) to a 100 ml conical flask and place the flask under the condenser of the distillation apparatus in such a way that the end of the condenser dips into the solution. Add 20 ml of sodium hydroxide (**4.4**) to the funnel of the apparatus and run the alkali slowly into the distillation chamber. Distil about 40 ml of condensate (the amount for quantitative results depends on the dimensions of the apparatus), rinse the end of the condenser, add a few drops of indicator (**4.6**) to the distillate and titrate with sulfuric acid (**4.7**) to a violet endpoint.

NOTE 5 A potentiometric titration is also possible. The endpoint of the titration should be pH = 5,0.

NOTE 6 If steam distillation is used, a distillation rate of up to about 25 ml/min is applicable. Stop the distillation when about 100 ml of distillate have been collected.

Carry out a blank test in which the same procedure is performed without soil. Notify the consumption of sulfuric acid in the blank test and in the tests of the soil samples.

8 Calculation of the result

The total content of nitrogen, (w_N), in milligrams per gram, is calculated using the formula:

$$w_N = \frac{(V_1 - V_0) \times c(H^+) \times M_N}{m} \times \frac{100 + w_{H_2O}}{100}$$

where

V_1 is the volume, in millilitres, of the sulfuric acid (**4.7**) used in the titration of the sample [indicator (**4.6**)];

V_0 is the volume, in millilitres, of the sulfuric acid (**4.7**) used in the blank test [indicator (**4.6**)];

$c(H^+)$ is the concentration of H^+ in the sulfuric acid (**4.7**), in moles per litre [e.g. if 0,01 mol/l sulfuric acid is used, $c(H^+)$ = 0,02 mol/l];

M_N is the molar mass of nitrogen, in grams per mole (= 14);

m is the mass, in grams, of the air-dried sample of soil;

w_{H_2O} is the water content, expressed as a percentage by mass, on the basis of oven-dried soil, determined according to ISO 11465.

Round the result to two significant figures.

9 Precision

The precision data according to ISO 5725 were determined from an experiment conducted in 1992 involving 14 laboratories and 4 soil samples. The results obtained are given in Table 1.

From the data in Table 1, it can be concluded that the difference between two separate determinations should not exceed 15 % of the measured total nitrogen content when the content is less than 2 mg/g, and 10 % of the measured total nitrogen content when the content is greater than 2 mg/g.

10 Test report

The test report shall contain the following information:

a) a reference to this International Standard;

b) a complete identification of the sample;

c) the results of the determination;

d) any details not specified in this International Standard or which are optional, as well as any factor which may have affected the results.

Table 1 — General average of nitrogen content, s_r, r, s_R and R calculated after elimination of outliers

Sample No.	Nitrogen content, w_N mg/g	Repeatability conditions of soil mg/g		Reproducibility conditions mg/g	
		s_r	r	s_r	R
1	0,98	0,06	0,17	0,27	0,76
2	3,11	0,12	0,33	0,58	1,62
3	6,70	0,19	0,54	1,07	3,00
4	10,88	0,26	0,74	0,89	2,50

s_r is the repeatability standard deviation
r is the repeatability value
s_R is the reproducibility standard deviation
R is the reproducibility value

Annex A (informative)
Bibliography

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[3] WILLIAMS, P.C. *J. Sci. Fd. Agric.* **24** (1973), p. 343.

List of references

See national foreword.

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