

## Relative performance of various composts and NPK fertilizer on upgrowth and quality of fodder maize

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### Abstract

**Purpose** Shortage, high prices and adverse effects of fertilizers drive to hunt alternative sources (such as compost) for crop husbandry and environment sustainability. A field trial was executed to observe the effect of various composts on growth and macronutrients' concentration in fodder maize (*Zea mays* L. cv. Akbar).

**Method** The treatments with four repeats included: Control (No amendment), Recommended NPK, Water hyacinth compost, Fruits + vegetables compost, and Banana leaves compost; each compost was supplemented at the rate of 15 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>. The experimental soil was fine textured (clayey), slightly alkaline in reaction, non-saline, poor in organic matter content, calcareous in nature, low in nitrogen, marginal in phosphorus and adequate in potassium.

**Results** The supplementation of composts and NPK fertilizer significantly increased the growth and yield parameters (plant height up to 26%, number of leaves plant<sup>-1</sup> up to 20%, stem girth up to 22%, and fresh weight of maize fodder up to 25%), and the concentrations of selected macronutrients (N up to 46%, P up to 27%, and K up to 38%) in maize leaves with respect to control. There was no significant variation among various compost treatments and NPK fertilizer application for defined parameters, except for P concentration in maize leaves. A significant enhancement in macronutrients' concentrations in surface and subsurface soil, over control plots, has also been observed where inorganic and organic applications were made.

**Conclusion** We conclude that compost should be included in maize husbandry for enhanced productivity and quality and to minimize the dependence on inorganic fertilizers.

**Keywords** Composting, Inorganic fertilizers, Maize productivity and quality, Organic waste management

### Introduction

Municipal solid waste (MSW) has become a critical issue worldwide because of increase in human population, economic growth, urbanization, and change in lifestyle (Al-Khatib et al. 2010; Thi et al. 2015; Akmal and Jamal 2021). The generation and composition of the MSW is variable among developed and developing countries; High-income countries usually generate less

organic waste and more recyclable waste, whereas in low-income countries majority of the MSW (65%) is organic in nature (Al-Khatib et al. 2010; Colon et al. 2010). Food waste comprises the main fraction (50-55%) of the total municipal solid waste in developing nations (Thi et al. 2015).

In Pakistan, no comprehensive study is available which describes the municipal solid waste generation, collection, composition and disposal data for the entire country or most of its regions. However, some studies are carried out which describe the practices of solid waste management in few major cities or towns of a particular city (Mahar et al. 2007; Batool and Chaudry 2009; Aslam et al. 2021). These studies describe that the municipal solid waste generation is variable within cities (Mahar et al. 2007), ranging up to 15,600 metric tons per day in Karachi, the largest city of Pakistan (Aslam et al. 2021). The collection rate of solid waste is different among cities, ranging from 51% to 75%

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(Mahar et al. 2007; Masood et al. 2014; Aslam et al. 2021). Sadly, no city has official material recovery, recycling and disposal facility and/or an integrated solid waste management system (Mahar et al. 2007; Masood et al. 2014; Aslam et al. 2021); therefore, the collected waste is dumped in open spaces (Batool and Chaudry 2009; Korai et al. 2017). The uncollected waste remains lying in vacant plots, along streets, roads and railway lines, open drains, and low-lying areas within the city vicinity (Batool and Chaudry 2009). This open dumping of waste leads to the production of compounds which can pollute the environment and underground aquifer (Anikwe and Nwobodo 2002; Nagendran et al. 2006; Buteh et al. 2013; Hassan et al. 2021), ultimately affecting the wellbeing of humans (Akmal and Jamil 2021). Collection and disposal of waste also incurs a huge amount of money; for example, a cost of 3.2 million dollars was estimated for only collection and disposal of waste in a town of Lahore (Batool and Chaudry 2009). The characterization of the collected solid waste indicates that the largest proportion (67%) of the waste is organic in nature (Batool and Chaudry 2009; Jadoon et al. 2014), with no defined data for food waste proportion. This organic waste should be considered as a valuable resource and convincing strategies should be adopted in the country for its efficient utilization.

Many countries have adopted such techniques of waste management, which are eco-friendly and can recycle waste into valuable product, such as producing energy, organic fertilizer and compost (Evangelisti et al. 2015, Thi et al. 2015; Tumwesigye et al. 2016; Saleh 2021). Composting is an eco-friendly method of recycling organic wastes (Courtney and Mullen 2008; Pellejero et al. 2017; Alsri et al. 2018). Composting is a bio-oxidative process, which involves the mineralization and humification of organic waste resulting in a stabilized product having humic properties and free from pathogens and phytotoxicity (Bernal et al. 2009). Composting is a versatile technique for converting organic waste into soil amendment (Gajalakshmi and Abbasi 2008; Sayara et al. 2020). High prices of inorganic fertilizers and their negative impacts on agriculture sustainability grow interest in converting organic municipal solid waste into compost which can enhance soil fertility and health, and crop productivity (Mahajan et al. 2008; Giannakis et al. 2014; Pellejero et al. 2017; Zahra et al. 2021). Compost application can contribute to agricultural sustainability through enhancing organic matter content, water retention capacity, soil

aggregation, nutrient availability, biomass production, microbial activity, and reducing soil bulk density and plant pathogens (Wells et al. 2000; Montemurro et al. 2006; Gajalakshmi and Abbasi 2008; Doan et al. 2015; Miller et al. 2015). The application of composts is also involved in reducing gases' emission and leaching of N from soils (Dalal et al. 2009; Dalal et al. 2010; Vaughan et al. 2011) and remediating the soils contaminated with hazardous materials and excess salts (Hanay et al. 2004; Sayara et al. 2020). Hence, it is urgently required to adopt this approach of composting for crop husbandry.

Current study is an effort to recognize the impacts of various composts on a test crop, maize (*Zea mays* L.) in the agro-climatic conditions of Tando Jam, Pakistan. Maize has been selected for this study because the crop mainly relies on commercial fertilizers for its production (Arif et al. 2012). Maize has also its role as a source of food for humans, fodder for animals and raw material for industries because of its broad global distribution, low price, diverse grain types and biological and industrial properties (Dowswell et al. 1996; Kumar et al. 2014). Maize is an important cereal crop, and it ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in production in the world while ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in Asia after rice and wheat (Dowswell et al. 1996; FAOSTAT 2019). In Pakistan, maize is grown over 1318 thousand hectares with an annual production of 6309 thousand tons (Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19). However, the potential yield of maize crop is still below when compared to yields in other countries (Farhad et al. 2009). The major factors associated to lower yields of maize are low fertility status of soils and inappropriate fertilization (Oad et al. 2004). Considerable work has been done overseas where the effect of various composts (individually or in combination with inorganic fertilizers) has been considered on maize crop and enhancement in growth and yield components, and nutrient concentrations have been documented (Rahman et al. 2013; Abdulraheem et al. 2018; Olowoake et al. 2018). Additionally, the improvement in soil physical parameters, nutrient contents and microbial biomass has also been reported by compost and compost + inorganic fertilization (Adediran et al. 2005; Ahmad et al. 2008). In Pakistan, the effect of compost (individually or in combination with various inorganic fertilizers) is quantified and increase in growth and yield components in maize, and soil physical and chemical parameters have been documented (Amanullah et al. 2015; Bilal et al. 2017; Iqbal et al. 2019; Zahra et al. 2021).

The present study is unique in a sense that three different organic wastes (Water hyacinth plants, Fruits and Vegetables waste, and Banana leaves) having diverse origins were converted to compost and utilized to compare their efficiency with recommended NPK fertilizer for maize production. The effectiveness of these wastes on maize productivity and quality will encourage their usage for crop husbandry in Pakistan and globally. Additionally, the assessment of quality of maize tissues and fertility of amended soils (with respect to NPK) as a function of organic-and-inorganic amendments in current study will add data to limited scientific inventory (Adediran et al. 2005; Bharath et al. 2017; Zahra et al. 2021). Hence, the present study was carried out to assess the impacts of various composts and NPK fertilizer on the growth and NPK concentration in maize plants and their subsequent buildup in soil.

## Materials and methods

### Experimental details

The experiment was laid out using randomized complete block design at Latif experimental farm of Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam (Latitude 25°44'40" N and longitude 68°53'91" E), during Rabi season 2017-2018. The climate of the study area is generally arid to subtropical, where summers are moderately hot, and winters are cool. Such type of climate is generally preferred for maize cultivation. A total of 396 m<sup>2</sup> land was selected, which was ploughed, levelled and then divided in to 20 equal experimental units of 16 m<sup>2</sup> (4 m × 4 m). The treatments comprised of different organic and inorganic amendments with four replication each: T<sub>1</sub>: Control (No amendment), T<sub>2</sub>: Recommended NPK (130 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>, 80 kg P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> ha<sup>-1</sup> and 40 kg K<sub>2</sub>O ha<sup>-1</sup>), T<sub>3</sub>: Water hyacinth compost (15 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>), T<sub>4</sub>: Fruits + vegetables compost (15 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>), and T<sub>5</sub>: Banana leaves compost (15 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>). The seeds of maize (cv. Akbar) were purchased from local market, presoaked for overnight and sown using hand drill. The irrigation and agronomic practices were kept same for all plots. The experiment was terminated before the initiation of flowering (90 days after sowing).

### Amendments application

The inorganic amendment was applied as suggested by Gandahi (2010). Full dose of P and a fraction

of N was applied as DAP, while full dose of K was supplied as SOP during land preparation. Remaining portion of nitrogen was applied as Urea at the time of second irrigation. The soil was amended with composts during land preparation. During land preparation, the calculated amounts of composts were spread on the soil by the hand, followed by ploughing and levelling. The composts used in this study were prepared locally at the Department of Soil Science, SAU Tandojam. Three different composts having diverse organic materials (Fruits and vegetable, Banana leaves and Water hyacinth plants) were collected from the vicinity of Tando Jam. Before filling in the pit, the banana leaves, and fruits and vegetables wastes were chopped into small pieces (< 1 inches) while the plants of water hyacinth were air dried for three days. These organic wastes were blended with cattle manure in 3:1 (9 inches layer of organic wastes and 3 inches layer of cattle manure: called one-unit layer); in total 4-unit layers were developed. Each waste was turned regularly on 15 days interval, and on each turning, temperature was recorded, and the waste was moistened, if necessary. The wastes were processed for three months, followed by one month for stabilization and drying.

### Plant observations and analysis

#### Agronomic observations

Nine healthy plants were chosen from each replication plot for recording agronomic observations at the time of harvest. Plant height was taken from the base to the tip of the plant by measuring scale. The leaves per plant were counted manually. Stem girth of selected plants was taken from 4 inches above soil using Vernier caliper (Tricle Brand, China). The fresh weight of plants was taken using digital weight balance in kilograms (Accurate, Model No. TCS-80). This mass was converted to tons per hectare.

#### Plant analysis

At harvest, the uppermost fully developed leaf (the leaf with collar visible) was collected (as suggested by Schwab et al. 2007), for nutrient analysis. The samples were cleaned and washed with 1% HCl, followed by rinsing with distilled water. Afterwards, the samples were oven dried at 70 °C for 48 hours and ground in mechanical grinder (Retsch GmbH mill, West Germany).

### **Nitrogen concentration in plant tissues**

The N concentration was determined by the method delineated by Estefan et al. (2013). In brief, plant samples were digested using catalyst mixture 100:1 ( $K_2SO_4$ -Se) and concentrated sulfuric acid, followed by distillation with 40% NaOH, and titration with 0.1 N HCl till the navy blue color appeared.

### **Phosphorus and Potassium concentrations in plant tissues**

Phosphorus and potassium in plant tissues were determined by Wet digestion technique, as outlined by Estefan et al. (2013). In brief, plant materials were digested with di-acid mixture ( $HNO_3$ - $HClO_4$ , 2:1) using hot plate. The samples were cooled, filtered and their volume was raised to 50 ml by adding distilled water. The samples were determined for phosphorus using Spectrophotometer at the wavelength of 480 nm, while the determination of potassium was carried out using Flame Photometer.

### **Soil sampling and analysis**

The composite samples were taken before sowing and after crop harvest from each replication plot at desired depths (0-15 and 15-30 cm) using stainless steel auger. The EC and pH were determined in 1:2.5 soil water extracts using EC meter (Sartorius PB-11) and pH meter (Schott Lab 960). The texture, organic matter and lime content, and available P and K contents were determined by following the procedures outlined by Estefan et al. (2013). In brief, for texture, the Bouyoucos Hydrometer technique was adopted. The defined amount of soil, sodium hexametaphosphate and distilled water was mixed and left for overnight. After dispersion, transfer and insertion of hydrometer, the reading was recorded at prescribed times to determine the amount of soil particles and textural class. For organic matter content, the specified amount of soil was added with proposed amount of potassium dichromate and sulphuric acid and left for overnight. Next day, with defined amount of distilled water, orthophosphoric acid and diphenylamine indicator, the samples were titrated with ferrous ammonium sulphate until color switched to brilliant green. In case of lime content, one gram of soil was added with ten ml HCl, and samples were allowed to stand for overnight. Next day, the stuff was added

with prescribed amount of distilled water and phenolphthalein indicator, followed by titration with sodium hydroxide until the color switched to light pink. Phosphorus and potassium concentration in samples were analyzed by AB-DTPA method, for which ten grams of soil along with twenty ml of AB-DTPA solution was shaken, filtered and used for analysis of P and K. The concentration of P was determined using Spectrophotometer while the concentration of K was determined using Flame photometer. The soil nitrogen content was calculated from soil organic matter.

### **Statistical analysis**

The soil and plant data were subjected to ANOVA using Minitab 17 software. The difference among treatments was assessed by Tukey's test at 0.05 *P* value.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Physico-chemical properties of soil before sowing of maize fodder**

The physico-chemical characteristics of the experimental site, before sowing, indicate that the soil at the depth of 0-15 and 15-30 cm was clay and sandy clay in texture, slightly alkaline in reaction ( $pH\ 7.65 \pm 0.09$  and  $7.68 \pm 0.09$ ), non-saline ( $EC\ 1.24 \pm 0.15\ dS\ m^{-1}$  and  $1.05 \pm 0.12\ dS\ m^{-1}$ ), poor in organic matter content ( $0.78 \pm 0.08\%$  and  $0.76 \pm 0.03\%$ ), calcareous in nature ( $15.4 \pm 0.66\%$  and  $16.4 \pm 0.83\%$ ), low in total nitrogen concentration ( $0.039 \pm 0.004\%$  and  $0.038 \pm 0.002\%$ ), marginal in available phosphorus concentration ( $5.40 \pm 0.60\ mg\ kg^{-1}$  and  $5.00 \pm 0.36\ mg\ kg^{-1}$ ) and adequate in available potassium concentration ( $202 \pm 35.6\ mg\ kg^{-1}$  and  $190 \pm 10.0\ mg\ kg^{-1}$ ), respectively.

### **Effects of organic-and-inorganic amendments on growth and yield of maize fodder**

Growth and yield attributes of maize fodder were significantly influenced by the application of inorganic NPK and various composts ( $P < 0.05$ , Table 1). The supplementation of inorganic NPK and organic composts were found equal for enhancing growth and yield parameters (plant height, number of leaves, stem girth and fresh weight). The application of amendments increased plant height of maize fodder from 24.9 to 25.9%, number of leaves plant<sup>-1</sup> from 13.9 to 20.4%, stem girth from

16.1 to 22.5%, and fresh weight from 22.2 to 25.4% over control plants. The possible reason for increase in growth and yield parameters of maize fodder may be associated with the presence and availability of macronutrients (e.g., N, P, and K) from organic and inorganic sources and the subsequent accumulation of these nutrients by maize crop (Table 2). These nutrients play an important role in many physiological processes involved in the growth and development of plants (Inam-ul-Haque and Jakhro 1996; Bharath et al. 2017; Pellejero et al. 2016). Higher growth and yield of maize crop with organic and inorganic amendments over control may also be associated with better physiological attributes (e.g.,

stomatal conductance, transpiration rate, photosynthesis, and chlorophyll content) in plants (Tabbasum et al. 2021). The positive effect of organic and inorganic amendments on growth and yield components of maize has been reported by many researchers. For example, Masowa et al. (2015) reported that application of NPK fertilizer and various composts significantly increased plant height, stem diameter, number of functional leaves plant<sup>-1</sup>, and dry matter yield over control treatment. In another study, Sallah et al. (2017) observed that the maize height, number of leaves plant<sup>-1</sup> and stem girth were relatively better in organic and inorganic treatments than control treatment.

**Table 1** Effect of soil amendments on growth and yield characters of maize fodder

Treatments	Plant height (cm)	Number of leaves plant <sup>-1</sup>	Stem girth (cm)	Fresh weight (t ha <sup>-1</sup> )
Control	130.2 ± 6.6 <sup>B</sup>	10.8 ± 0.18 <sup>B</sup>	3.29 ± 0.09 <sup>B</sup>	22.08 ± 1.13 <sup>B</sup>
NPK	163.9 ± 5.4 <sup>A</sup>	13.0 ± 0.32 <sup>A</sup>	3.99 ± 0.12 <sup>A</sup>	27.59 ± 1.05 <sup>A</sup>
Water hyacinth compost	163.5 ± 5.6 <sup>A</sup>	12.8 ± 0.54 <sup>A</sup>	3.88 ± 0.10 <sup>A</sup>	26.99 ± 0.68 <sup>A</sup>
Fruits + vegetables compost	162.6 ± 4.4 <sup>A</sup>	12.6 ± 0.14 <sup>A</sup>	3.82 ± 0.13 <sup>AB</sup>	27.70 ± 0.33 <sup>A</sup>
Banana leaves compost	162.8 ± 6.8 <sup>A</sup>	12.3 ± 0.44 <sup>A</sup>	4.03 ± 0.16 <sup>A</sup>	27.65 ± 0.94 <sup>A</sup>

Each value is a mean ± SE (n=4); Means followed by different capital letters are significantly different from each other ( $P < 0.05$ ) with respect to soil amendments.

In current study, there was no significant difference for selected growth and yield parameters in maize between compost treatments and NPK fertilization. These results are very promising with respect to compost application and offer a viable alternate to expensive inorganic fertilizers. A comparable growth and yield of maize with various composts to inorganic fertilizer may be credited to additional benefits of compost application which include improved total microbial biomass, organic matter content, availability of essential macronutrients, aggregate stability, permeability and water retention capacity of the soil (Adediran et al. 2005; Ahmad et al. 2008; Aziz et al. 2010). Earlier studies have reported a variable outcome of organic and inorganic supplementation on maize productivity. A better growth and yield of maize has been reported in organic amendments when compared with the inorganic fertilizers (Rahman et al. 2013; Bilal et al. 2017; Sallah et al. 2017; Olowoake et al. 2018). In contrast, inorganic

sources have also found superior for maize growth and yield over organic sources (Kanton et al. 2016). Nonetheless, other studies recommend a combined application of organic and inorganic amendments for maximizing the maize growth and yield (Iqbal et al. 2017; Mahmood et al. 2017; Naeem et al. 2017; Tabbasum et al. 2021). Such contrasting results on maize production may be attributed to different rate and sources of organic and inorganic fertilizers, soil conditions, crop growth stage, and maize varieties (Khan et al. 2008; Shah et al. 2009; Oyun et al. 2016; Manolikaki and Diamadopoulou 2019).

#### Effect of soil amendments on selected macronutrients' concentration in maize leaves

The data regarding the effect of various composts and NPK amendments on macronutrients' concentration (%) in maize leaves are reported in Table 2. The con-

centration of N in maize leaves increased from 36.7 to 45.6% over control, where all organic and inorganic treatments were found equal. The application of NPK accounted for highest concentration of P in maize leaves with 27% increase over control. While the K concentration increased from 21.6 to 38.1% over control, where maximum concentration was found in plants which were treated with NPK, fruits + vegetables compost and banana leaves compost. The increase in NPK concentrations in maize leaves may be associated to addition of composts and NPK fertilizer to the crop and its subsequent uptake by maize crop. The application of organic and/or inorganic fertilizers increases the ion concentration in soil solution, thus results in improved

nutrient uptake by plants (Aziz et al. 2010; Bharat et al. 2017). Increase in NPK concentration in maize tissues by organic and inorganic treatments has also been reported. Adediran et al. (2005) documented relatively higher concentration of N, P and K in maize ear leaf for organic and inorganic fertilizers than the control treatment. Rasool et al. (2008) observed a higher NPK uptake in maize crop with FYM (farm yard manure) and inorganic fertilizer treatments than the control plots. Similarly, few recent studies have reported a high concentration/uptake of NPK in maize tissues (shoot and grains) by the application of organic and inorganic amendments (Bharat et al. 2017; Naeem et al. 2017; Tabbasum et al. 2021).

**Table 2** Effect of soil amendments on selected macronutrients' concentration (%) in maize leaves

Treatments	Nitrogen (%)	Phosphorus (%)	Potassium (%)
Control	1.69 ± 0.07 <sup>B</sup>	0.198 ± 0.003 <sup>C</sup>	1.34 ± 0.02 <sup>B</sup>
NPK	2.31 ± 0.07 <sup>A</sup>	0.251 ± 0.004 <sup>A</sup>	1.85 ± 0.10 <sup>A</sup>
Water hyacinth compost	2.36 ± 0.19 <sup>A</sup>	0.233 ± 0.002 <sup>B</sup>	1.63 ± 0.09 <sup>AB</sup>
Fruits + vegetables compost	2.46 ± 0.18 <sup>A</sup>	0.233 ± 0.005 <sup>B</sup>	1.78 ± 0.06 <sup>A</sup>
Banana leaves compost	2.37 ± 0.06 <sup>A</sup>	0.229 ± 0.005 <sup>B</sup>	1.75 ± 0.06 <sup>A</sup>

Each value is a mean ± SE ( $n=4$ ); Means followed by different capital letters are significantly different from each other ( $P < 0.05$ ) with respect to soil amendments

### Effect of soil amendments on selected macronutrients concentration in soil after harvest of maize fodder

The organic and inorganic soil amendments significantly enhanced N, P and K concentrations in surface and subsurface soil than the control plots (Table 3). The total N increased by 97.8 to 142.2%, available P increased by 36.9 to 59.8%, and available K enhanced by 48.9 to 77.0% in both soil surfaces, over control plots. Such an increase may be associated to the application of the compost and NPK fertilizer in experimental soil. Similar findings of enhanced nutrient contents in soils by applications of organic and inorganic fertilizers are also documented. Soils treated with compost and inorganic N fertilizer improved  $\text{NO}_3\text{-N}$  and P content in experimental soil with respect to control plots (De Toledo et al. 1996; Adediran et al. 2005; Courtney and Mullen 2008; Pellejero et al. 2021). Organic and inorganic treatments significantly increased the N, P and

K concentrations in soil at maize harvest (Olowoake et al. 2018). In few other studies, the soil organic carbon, N, P, K, and soil moisture content increased while soil EC and pH decreased with sole compost application or combined application of organic-inorganic amendments (Rahman et al. 2013; Naeem et al. 2017; Iqbal et al. 2019).

Although the physical and biological properties in post-harvest soils were not investigated in current study, the review of previous studies of maize highlights the positive effect of organic-and-inorganic fertilizers on these properties (Adediran et al. 2005; Ahmad et al. 2008; Rasool et al. 2008; Iqbal et al. 2019), hence these benefits may also be the contributor of higher productivity and quality of maize fodder, and soil fertility in our study.

### Conclusion

The application of different composts and NPK fertilizer significantly enhanced (in most cases) the selected

**Table 3** Effect of soil amendments on selected macronutrients' concentration (mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) in surface and subsurface soil after harvest

Treatments	Concentration of macronutrients in surface soil (0-15 cm)		
	Nitrogen (mg kg <sup>-1</sup> )	Phosphorus (mg kg <sup>-1</sup> )	Potassium (mg kg <sup>-1</sup> )
Control	0.046 ± 0.001 <sup>B</sup>	5.15 ± 0.21 <sup>B</sup>	185 ± 25.0 <sup>B</sup>
NPK	0.091 ± 0.003 <sup>A</sup>	7.05 ± 0.34 <sup>A</sup>	285 ± 12.8 <sup>AB</sup>
Water hyacinth compost	0.091 ± 0.012 <sup>A</sup>	7.25 ± 0.17 <sup>A</sup>	316 ± 25.6 <sup>A</sup>
Fruits + vegetables compost	0.104 ± 0.001 <sup>A</sup>	7.40 ± 0.39 <sup>A</sup>	312 ± 25.2 <sup>A</sup>
Banana leaves compost	0.099 ± 0.006 <sup>A</sup>	7.45 ± 0.25 <sup>A</sup>	325 ± 25.0 <sup>A</sup>
Treatments	Concentration of macronutrients in sub-surface soil (15-30 cm)		
	Nitrogen (mg kg <sup>-1</sup> )	Phosphorus (mg kg <sup>-1</sup> )	Potassium (mg kg <sup>-1</sup> )
Control	0.045 ± 0.001 <sup>C</sup>	4.60 ± 0.45 <sup>B</sup>	178 ± 8.4 <sup>B</sup>
NPK	0.090 ± 0.002 <sup>B</sup>	6.85 ± 0.22 <sup>A</sup>	265 ± 14.8 <sup>A</sup>
Water hyacinth compost	0.102 ± 0.002 <sup>AB</sup>	7.05 ± 0.24 <sup>A</sup>	305 ± 23.9 <sup>A</sup>
Fruits + vegetables compost	0.109 ± 0.005 <sup>A</sup>	7.35 ± 0.26 <sup>A</sup>	313 ± 13.7 <sup>A</sup>
Banana leaves compost	0.097 ± 0.002 <sup>AB</sup>	7.00 ± 0.37 <sup>A</sup>	315 ± 20.6 <sup>A</sup>

Each value is a mean ± SE (n=4); Means followed by different capital letters are significantly different from each other (P < 0.05) with respect to soil amendments

growth and yield components, and NPK concentration in maize leaves and soil (after harvest, in surface and subsurface levels) than control treatment. It is suggested that maize crop should be fertilized with inorganic or organic manures to improve its growth, yield and nutrients' content. A comparable effect of various composts on maize crop and soil fertility to NPK fertilizer is also encouraging and suggests composts use for maize crop to minimize the dependence on inorganic fertilizers. Future studies with various crops and soil conditions are also advised to validate the findings of this study.

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### Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this study.

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