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Dyeing to be Noticed

It's pretty hard not to notice a potash evaporation pond against the natural earth tones of the Utah desert, even from an altitude of 250 miles.

In the past, the production of potassium-based fertilizers has involved dangerous underground mining operations. These days the minerals are extracted from the ground via simple chemistry and solar energy.

At this site in Moab, Utah, water from the Colorado River is heated and injected into old shaft mines to dissolve the potash deposits. This solution is pumped into evaporation ponds, where the sun goes to work concentrating the solution through evaporation. An agent is added that attaches itself to the suspended potassium chloride and causes it to float to the surface, where it is skimmed off and packaged for use as plant fertilizer. A dye is added to accelerate the evaporation process, producing the somewhat shocking hue of electric blue.

