Finding Roots of Polynomials Using MathCad
(Dr. Tom Co 9/27/2008)

Introduction.

There are several applications in chemical engineering processes which result in a polynomial equation of an unknown variable. Some examples include the cubic equations of state such as Van der Waals, Redlich-Kwong and Peng-Robinson. Other situations result from geometrical relationships such as area or volume, or result from physical relationships such as radiation heat transfer.

MathCad Procudure.

1. Write the polynomial as a function.
2. Extract the coefficients of the function into a variable.
3. Using the function polyroots() to obtain all the roots.

Example:

\[ f(x) := 0.2 x^3 - x^2 + 5x - 50 \]

\[ C = f(x) \text{ coeffs } x \rightarrow \begin{pmatrix} -50 \\ 5 \\ -2 \\ 0.2 \end{pmatrix} \]

\[ r := \text{polyroots}(C) \]

\[ r = \begin{pmatrix} -0.883 - 6.014i \\ -0.883 + 6.014i \\ 6.763 \end{pmatrix} \]

Remarks:

a) In finding the coefficients, use [ctrl shift period] to obtain a placeholder. Then type coeffs followed by comma and the unknown variable. A more general alternative, is to use [view]->[toolbars]->[symbolic] then select coeffs. This will allow for several symbolic manipulation entries, such as float (to set the number of significant figures in the result).

b) The polyroots( ) function will yield all the roots. Thus, the user will need to determine which roots makes physical sense.

c) This method does not allow for units.