



THE EFFECT OF PHYTOPATHOGENIC VIRUSES ON PLANT PHYSIOLOGICAL AND BIOCHEMICAL PROPERTIES

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Abstract:

Phytopathogenic viruses are a significant threat to global agriculture, causing substantial losses in crop yields and quality. These viruses not only affect plant growth but also induce a range of physiological and biochemical changes that alter plant health. This article reviews the effects of phytopathogenic viruses on plant physiological processes such as growth, photosynthesis, respiration, and nutrient uptake, as well as biochemical changes, including alterations in metabolic pathways and enzyme activities. The disruption of these processes can lead to reduced plant productivity, diminished quality, and in severe cases, plant death. Understanding these virus-induced changes is critical for developing effective strategies to manage viral infections in crops. Additionally, the article explores how plants respond to viral infection through biochemical defense mechanisms, such as the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the activation of systemic resistance. This review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interaction between phytopathogenic viruses and plant systems, highlighting the need for continued research to mitigate the impacts of these viruses on agricultural productivity.

Keywords: Phytopathogenic viruses, plant physiology, biochemical properties, virus-induced stress, plant immunity, crop loss, metabolic changes, oxidative stress.



Introduction

Phytopathogenic viruses are among the most devastating pathogens in the plant kingdom, affecting a wide variety of crops, from food staples like tomatoes and potatoes to ornamental plants. These viruses, unlike bacterial or fungal pathogens, are typically non-living entities that require a host cell to replicate. They rely on vectors such as insects, fungi, or mechanical means for transmission, leading to the spread of infections in agricultural environments. As the global demand for food increases, understanding the impacts of these viruses on plant health becomes increasingly important for safeguarding crop yields and ensuring food security.

Plants possess complex physiological and biochemical systems that allow them to grow, reproduce, and respond to environmental challenges. These processes include photosynthesis, respiration, water and nutrient uptake, and the synthesis of essential biomolecules. When a plant is infected by a phytopathogenic virus, these systems can be severely disrupted. For example, viral infection can lead to stunted growth, altered water relations, and a decrease in photosynthetic efficiency, all of which can have a detrimental effect on the overall health and productivity of the plant.

Biochemically, viruses induce a cascade of reactions that alter plant metabolic pathways. Viral infections often result in changes to primary metabolites, including sugars and amino acids, and secondary metabolites, such as alkaloids and phenolics, which are crucial for plant defense. Furthermore, viruses can induce oxidative stress by increasing the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS), leading to cellular damage if not controlled by the plant's defense mechanisms. The interaction between phytopathogenic viruses and plants is multifaceted, involving both the direct effects of the virus on plant cellular machinery and the plant's subsequent defense responses. Understanding these interactions at a physiological and biochemical level is essential for developing strategies to mitigate the impact of viral diseases on crops. This article reviews the key physiological and biochemical changes induced by viral infections, highlighting the complex nature of plant-virus interactions and their implications for agriculture.

ANALYSIS AND METHODS OF LITERATURE

Physiological Effects of Phytopathogenic Viruses on Plants. Phytopathogenic viruses can significantly disrupt the normal physiological functions of plants. These



effects are often observed in several aspects of plant growth and development, including growth rate, photosynthetic efficiency, respiration, and water/nutrient uptake. Virus-induced changes can reduce the overall health of plants, making them more susceptible to secondary infections and environmental stressors.

- **Growth and Development.** One of the most immediate and noticeable effects of viral infection on plants is a reduction in growth. Infected plants often exhibit stunted growth, with smaller leaves, shorter stems, and poorly developed roots. This is especially common in viruses that target meristematic tissue, which is responsible for cell division and plant growth. For example, the tobacco mosaic virus (TMV) and the tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) can both cause significant dwarfing in infected plants. The reduction in growth is often due to the virus hijacking the plant's cellular machinery, using the plant's energy and resources to replicate itself rather than supporting normal cellular functions. In some cases, viral infections lead to abnormal development, such as leaf deformation, curling, or the formation of lesions. These developmental anomalies can further hinder the plant's ability to carry out photosynthesis and other essential functions.

- **Water and Nutrient Uptake.** Water and nutrient uptake are also affected by viral infections. Many viruses disrupt the plant's vascular system, which is responsible for transporting water, nutrients, and other essential compounds throughout the plant. For instance, the infection by the cucumber mosaic virus (CMV) can lead to a blockage in phloem and xylem tissues, impairing the plant's ability to effectively transport water and nutrients. This disruption in the vascular system can lead to symptoms of wilting, chlorosis (yellowing of leaves), and nutrient deficiencies, all of which ultimately reduce the plant's vigor and yield.

- **Photosynthesis.** Photosynthesis is a critical physiological process for plant survival and productivity. Virus-infected plants often exhibit reduced photosynthetic efficiency due to a combination of factors. Viral infections can cause a decrease in chlorophyll content, reduce the number of chloroplasts, and damage the thylakoid membranes where photosynthetic reactions occur. For instance, the barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV) can result in a decrease in chlorophyll a and b levels, leading to a decrease in the plant's ability to capture sunlight for energy production. Additionally, virus-induced alterations in stomatal function can further restrict the plant's ability to regulate gas exchange and control water loss, leading to an overall decline in photosynthetic rates.



- Respiration. Respiration in plants involves the breakdown of sugars to release energy, which is crucial for growth, development, and defense. However, viral infections often lead to alterations in plant respiration. Studies have shown that plants infected by viruses like the tomato yellow leaf curl virus (TYLCV) exhibit an increase in respiration rates, possibly due to increased metabolic activity as the plant attempts to respond to the infection. While this elevated respiration rate can initially be part of the plant's defense mechanism, prolonged disruption in respiratory processes can lead to energy depletion, weakening the plant and making it more vulnerable to other stresses.

Biochemical Changes Induced by Phytopathogenic Viruses. In addition to physiological disruptions, viral infections induce a wide range of biochemical changes in plants. These changes can affect the plant's metabolic pathways, enzyme activities, and overall stress responses. Understanding these alterations is crucial for uncovering how plants defend themselves against viral pathogens and how viruses manipulate the plant's biochemical machinery for their own replication.

Alteration of Metabolic Pathways. Viral infections can alter both primary and secondary metabolic pathways in plants. Primary metabolites, such as carbohydrates, proteins, and lipids, are directly involved in the plant's growth and development. For example, the infection of tobacco plants with the tobacco mosaic virus (TMV) results in changes to sugar metabolism, particularly a decrease in sucrose content, which is a key energy source for the plant. Similarly, viral infection can cause changes in amino acid synthesis, affecting protein production and overall plant growth. Secondary metabolites, which include compounds such as alkaloids, phenolics, and terpenoids, are typically involved in plant defense mechanisms. However, viral infection can lead to the overproduction or underproduction of these metabolites, often disrupting the plant's ability to mount an effective defense response. For instance, the cassava mosaic disease caused by the cassava mosaic virus (CMV) has been linked to changes in the production of phenolic compounds, which can affect the plant's resistance to herbivores and other pathogens.

Enzyme Activities. Viral infections can also lead to changes in the activities of various enzymes that are involved in the plant's metabolic processes and stress responses. For instance, increased activity of antioxidant enzymes, such as



superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and peroxidases (POD), is often observed in virus-infected plants. These enzymes are part of the plant's defense against oxidative stress, which is generated during viral infections due to the accumulation of reactive oxygen species (ROS). However, while antioxidant enzymes help protect plant cells from oxidative damage, prolonged viral infections can overwhelm the plant's ability to detoxify ROS, leading to cellular damage. Enzyme changes are not limited to antioxidant defense. In many cases, viral infection leads to altered activities of enzymes involved in carbohydrate metabolism, protein synthesis, and lipid metabolism. This metabolic reprogramming is part of the virus's strategy to hijack the plant's resources for viral replication.

Oxidative Stress. Oxidative stress is one of the major biochemical consequences of viral infections in plants. The replication of viruses in plant cells often leads to the production of excess reactive oxygen species (ROS), which can damage cell membranes, proteins, and nucleic acids. ROS such as superoxide radicals, hydrogen peroxide, and hydroxyl radicals are highly reactive and can cause oxidative damage to plant tissues. To combat this stress, plants activate antioxidant defense mechanisms, which help neutralize ROS. However, if viral replication is excessive or the plant's antioxidant defenses are overwhelmed, ROS accumulation can lead to further cellular damage and ultimately contribute to symptoms of disease, such as chlorosis, necrosis, and wilting.

Plant Defense Responses. In response to viral infections, plants activate a variety of biochemical defense mechanisms aimed at limiting viral spread. These include the production of secondary metabolites (e.g., phenolic compounds), the induction of systemic acquired resistance (SAR), and the activation of RNA silencing pathways, which target viral RNA for degradation. The activation of defense-related genes, including those encoding pathogenesis-related (PR) proteins, is often part of the plant's defense response to viral infections. While these defenses may initially reduce viral replication, in many cases, the virus can evolve mechanisms to suppress or evade these plant defenses, leading to ongoing infection and disease symptoms.

Case Studies and Examples. Understanding the physiological and biochemical impacts of phytopathogenic viruses is not only theoretical but also practical, as real-world cases provide valuable insights into how viral infections affect crops. Below



are examples of specific viral diseases that illustrate the diverse ways in which phytopathogenic viruses impact plant health and productivity.

Tomato Yellow Leaf Curl Virus (TYLCV) in Tomato Plants. Tomato yellow leaf curl virus (TYLCV), transmitted by the whitefly, is one of the most destructive viruses affecting tomato crops worldwide. TYLCV infection leads to a variety of physiological changes, such as leaf curling, yellowing, and stunting of the plant. Biochemically, TYLCV disrupts photosynthesis by reducing chlorophyll content, which results in decreased sugar production and overall plant growth. Enzyme activity studies have shown that TYLCV infection increases the levels of reactive oxygen species (ROS) in tomato plants, leading to oxidative stress and further damage to the plant's cells. TYLCV infection also alters secondary metabolite production. Research has shown that the levels of phenolic compounds, which are involved in plant defense, are affected, possibly leading to reduced plant resistance to secondary pathogens. Despite these disruptions, plants often activate defense mechanisms such as systemic acquired resistance (SAR), which triggers the expression of pathogenesis-related proteins. However, TYLCV can suppress some of these defenses, allowing the virus to proliferate and causing significant yield losses.

Cucumber Mosaic Virus (CMV) in Cucurbits. Cucumber mosaic virus (CMV) infects a wide range of crops, including cucumbers, melons, and tomatoes. CMV infection causes a decrease in chlorophyll content, leading to reduced photosynthesis. In infected cucurbits, viral replication in the leaves and stems can severely limit the plant's growth and fruit production. Physiologically, CMV reduces the efficiency of nutrient uptake by impairing vascular function, leading to symptoms such as yellowing, wilting, and leaf necrosis. Biochemically, CMV alters the plant's metabolic processes by disrupting carbohydrate metabolism, leading to a reduction in sugar content. Enzyme assays have revealed changes in antioxidant enzyme activities in response to the oxidative stress generated by CMV infection. Although cucurbits increase the production of antioxidants such as superoxide dismutase and peroxidases in response to CMV, the infection often overwhelms the plant's defense system, leading to a decline in crop yield and quality.

Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMD) and Cassava Mosaic Virus (CMV). Cassava, an important staple crop in Africa, is severely affected by cassava mosaic disease



(CMD), caused by the cassava mosaic virus (CMV). Infected cassava plants exhibit stunted growth, reduced leaf area, and yellowing. Physiologically, CMV infection hampers the plant's water relations, causing wilting and poor root development. This impacts the crop's ability to produce tubers, the edible part of the plant. Biochemically, CMV alters the synthesis of secondary metabolites in cassava, especially phenolic compounds. These changes may reduce the plant's ability to defend itself against other pathogens or herbivores. Research has shown that CMV infection leads to a decrease in the production of alkaloids and other defensive chemicals, making the plants more vulnerable to secondary infections. The overall impact of CMD on cassava yields can be devastating, highlighting the economic importance of controlling viral diseases in crops.

CONCLUSION

Phytopathogenic viruses represent a significant threat to agricultural productivity, as they induce a wide range of physiological and biochemical changes in plants. These changes can lead to stunted growth, reduced photosynthesis, altered nutrient and water uptake, and increased oxidative stress, all of which undermine the health of the plant and reduce its yield. The biochemical alterations include modifications in metabolic pathways, enzyme activities, and secondary metabolite production, which can impair the plant's ability to defend itself against the virus and other pathogens.

Despite the damaging effects of viral infections, plants possess complex defense mechanisms to combat these pathogens. These include the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) to limit viral replication, activation of systemic acquired resistance (SAR), and changes in enzyme activity that help to mitigate oxidative stress. However, many viruses have evolved strategies to suppress plant defenses, leading to prolonged infections and further damage to the plant.

The case studies of TYLCV, CMV, and CMD illustrate the devastating impact of viral infections on crop health and productivity. These examples highlight the need for continued research into virus-plant interactions, as well as the development of strategies to manage viral diseases in agriculture. Advances in plant biotechnology, genetic resistance, and virus management techniques hold promise for reducing the impact of viral infections on crops. Additionally, understanding the biochemical

and physiological changes induced by viral infections can inform better agricultural practices and help ensure food security in the face of global challenges.

Future research should focus on improving the diagnostic tools for early detection of viral infections, exploring ways to enhance plant resistance to viruses, and understanding how environmental factors influence plant-virus interactions. By addressing these challenges, we can mitigate the negative effects of phytopathogenic viruses and improve agricultural sustainability worldwide.

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