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EXPLORATION OF *LIMONIUM* INTERSPECIFIC BREEDING POSSIBILITY

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EXPLORATION OF *LIMONIUM* INTERSPECIFIC BREEDING POSSIBILITY

Abstract

Interspecific crossability was investigated in the genus *Limonium* (Plumbaginaceae). Six *Limonium* species were chosen for this study, five of which are dimorphic and *L.perigrinum* which is monomorphic. Ovary, ovule and embryo development was investigated, as were *in vitro* pollen germination and pollen tube growth. Unilateral incompatibility was observed in 8 interspecific combinations. A high frequency of interspecific crossability was observed between *L.perezii* X *L.sinuatum* and *L.sinense* X *L.aureum*. Pollen tubes were frequently observed penetrating the ovules in these crosses. Pollen tube growth that terminated in the styles or was restricted to the stigmas was found in some *Limonium* interspecific crosses. Abnormalities of pollen tube growth in the interspecific crosses included heavy callose deposits at the tips of pollen tubes; pollen tube branching and pollen tube growing in the wrong direction.

Embryo, ovule and ovary development was studied with *L.perezii* plants following conspecific pollination. Three distinct groupings of florets can be recognised at the basis of their post-pollination growth and development. Twenty-six percent of conspecific pollinated florets showed no ovary and ovule growth. No embryo was found in this group. In eleven percent of florets, ovaries and ovules grew up to Day 12 after pollination and then shrivelled. No embryo was ever found in this group. Sixty-three percent florets produced embryos following conspecific pollination and developed normally.

The viability of *Limonium* pollen was assessed with Alexander's stain and fluorochromatic reaction (FCR) stain.

Optimal conditions for *in vitro* *L.perezii* pollen germination and tube growth were established. Poly-ethylene glycol and filter paper supports were of particular significance. *In vitro* pollen germination rate of about 40% was achieved. Plant growth regulators (IAA, GA₃ and ethylene), some minerals (manganese sulphate, copper sulphate) and prehydration treatment were used in experiments to improve pollen germination and tube growth. None of these factors, however, had positive effect on

either pollen germination or tube growth. It was found that while *L.perezii* pollen tube growth tolerates a wide range of temperature, there is an optimum between 20°C-25°C.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE INTERSPECIFIC CROSSABILITIES IN <i>LIMONIUM</i>	4
1.1 INTRODUCTION	4
1.1.1 The Description of Six <i>Limonium</i> Species	4
1.1.2 Dimorphism and Monomorphism in <i>Limonium</i>	12
1.1.3 Interspecific crosses	15
1.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS	16
1.2.1 Material:	16
1.2.2 Interspecific crosses:	17
1.2.3 Pollination Method:	17
1.2.4 Pollen adherence examination	17
1.2.5 Observation of pollen tube growth	18
1.3 RESULTS	19
1.3.1 Verification of stigma and pollen morphology	19
1.3.2 Pollen adherence	19
1.3.3 Pollen germination and tube growth in <i>Limonium</i>	22
1.3.4 The mean style and stigma lengths of 6 <i>Limonium</i> species	38
1.4 DISCUSSION	39
1.4.1 Pollen adherence	39

1.4.2 Unilateral incompatibility 40

1.4.3 Interspecific barriers and self-incompatibility 41

1.4.4 Abnormalities of pollen tube growth 43

1.4.5 The prospect for interspecific hybridization in *Limonium* 44

CHAPTER TWO OVARY, OVULE AND EMBRYO DEVELOPMENT OF
L. PEREZII FOLLOWING THE COMPATIBLE CONSPECIFIC
POLLINATION 46

2.1 INTRODUCTION 46

2.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS 47

2.3 RESULTS 47

2.4 DISCUSSION 61

CHAPTER THREE THE DETERMINATION OF *L. PEREZII* POLLEN VIABILITY
BY STAINING TECHNIQUES 64

3.1 INTRODUCTION 64

3.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS 66

3.2.1 Alexander’s Stain 66

3.2.2 Fluorescein Diacetate Medium 66

3.2.3 Observations 66

3.3. RESULTS 67

3.3.1 Alexander’s stain 67

3.3.2 FCR TEST 70

3.4 DISCUSSION 71

CHAPTER FOUR *L. PEREZII* POLLEN GERMINATION AND POLLEN TUBE
GROWTH *IN VITRO*
. 73

4.1 INTRODUCTION	73
4.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS	76
4.2.1 Plant Material	76
4.2.2 The Basic Germination Medium	76
4.2.3 Semi-solid Agar Medium	77
4.2.4 Dialysis-tubing & Filter-paper Supporter	77
4.2.5 Pollen tube growth rate	77
4.2.6 Treatments	78
4.2.7 Data Collection	79
4.3 RESULTS	80
4.3.1 Pollen Germination on Basic Medium	81
4.3.2 Experiments For Improving <i>L.perezii</i> Pollen Germination And Tube Length	89
4.4 DISCUSSION	98

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.1 Pollen adherence in legitimate <i>Limonium</i> interspecific crosses	21
1.2 Pollen adherence in the crosses in which <i>L.perigrinum</i> was female parent	23
1.3 Pollen adherence in the crosses in which <i>L.perigrinum</i> was pollen donor	23
1.4 The mean style and stigma lengths of six <i>Limonium</i> species	38
2.1 Developmental groups of <i>L.perezii</i> in terms of ovary and embryo growth following conspecific pollination	48
3.1 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen viability % of four plants with Alexander's stain	67
3.2 <i>L.perezii</i> non-aborted pollen percentage with Alexander's stain	69
3.3 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen rupture % in a series of concentrations of sucrose media	70
3.4 Comparison of Alexander's stain with FCR in estimating <i>L.perezii</i> pollen viability (%)	71
4.1 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen rupture rates in agar media	80
4.2 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination rates on the basic medium and the basic medium without sucrose	83
4.3 Seven <i>L.perezii</i> plants' pollen germination rates (%) and tube growth on the basic medium	83
4.4 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination and tube growth in the basic medium supplemented with IAA	90
4.5 The effect of GA ₃ on <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination and tube growth	90

4.6 The effect of ethylene on <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination and tube growth	91
4.7 The <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination and tube growth in the basic medium supplemented with $MnSO_4$	92
4.8 The <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination and tube growth on the basic medium supplemented with $CuSO_4$	92

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1.1 Diagrammatic longitudinal section of <i>Limonium vulgare</i>	13
1.2 Dimorphism of <i>Limonium</i> and pollination	14
1.3 Interspecific crosses between 6 <i>Limonium</i> species	24
2.1 Diagrammatic longitudinal section of <i>L.perezii</i> pistil following fertilisation	49
2.2 <i>L.perezii</i> ovary growth following conspecific compatible pollination	51
2.3 <i>L.perezii</i> ovule growth after compatible conspecific pollination	52
2.4 <i>L.perezii</i> embryo growth after compatible conspecific pollination	54
2.5 <i>L.perezii</i> suspensor growth after compatible conspecific pollination	55
2.6 Concurrent growth of the ovary and ovule of <i>L.perezii</i>	59
2.7 Concurrent growth of the ovule and embryo of <i>L.perezii</i>	60
2.8 Concurrent growth of the embryo and suspensor of <i>L.perezii</i>	61
Figure 3	64
4.1 The effect of prehydration on <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination	94
4.2 The effect of temperature on <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination	95
4.3 The effect of temperature on <i>L.perezii</i> pollen tube growth	96
4.4 The effect of temperature on <i>L.perezii</i> pollen tube branching	97

LIST OF PLATES

Plates	Page
1.1 Potted plant of <i>L.perigrinum</i>	6
1.2 A flower of <i>L.perigrinum</i>	6
1.3 Potted plant of <i>L.sinuatum</i>	7
1.4 <i>L.sinuatum</i> flowers	7
1.5 Potted plant of <i>L.perezii</i>	8
1.6 <i>L.perezii</i> flowers	8
1.7 Potted plant of <i>L.aureum</i>	9
1.8 <i>L.aureum</i> flowers	9
1.9 Potted plant of <i>L.sinense</i>	10
1.10 <i>L.sinense</i> flowers	10
1.11 Potted plant of <i>L.caspia</i>	11
1.12 <i>L.caspia</i> flowers	11
1.13 <i>L.perigrinum</i> capitata stigma	20
1.14 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of <i>L.perigrinum</i> on which are <i>L.caspia</i> pollen and pollen tubes	26
1.15 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of <i>L.sinense</i> stigmas and styles showing <i>L.perezii</i> pollen tubes which were blocked in the style.	28
1.16 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of <i>L.sinuatum</i> ovary showing <i>L.perezii</i> pollen tubes	30
1.17 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of <i>L.sinense</i> pistil showing <i>L.aureum</i> pollen tube penetrating the ovary with high frequency	31
1.18 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of a <i>L.sinuatum</i> stigma showing the <i>L.perezii</i> pollen tube with a swollen tip	33
1.19 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of a <i>L.perigrinum</i> style with a <i>L.aureum</i> pollen tube which had stopped growth and the tube had a big swollen tip.	34
1.20 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of a <i>L.sinense</i> stigma with a <i>L.caspia</i> pollen tube which grew apically at first and then turned back growing basipetally.	35
1.21 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of <i>L.caspia</i> stigma with a <i>L.perezii</i> pollen tube which became branched soon after germination	36

1.22 U.V. fluorescence photomicrograph of a <i>L.perezii</i> stigma with a <i>L.caspia</i> pollen grain from which two pollen tubes coming through two pores respectively	37
2.1 A three days old <i>L.perezii</i> embryo and a suspensor	53
2.2 A six days old <i>L.perezii</i> embryo and a suspensor	56
2.3 A nine days old <i>L.perezii</i> embryo and a suspensor	57
2.4 A 12 days old <i>L.perezii</i> embryo and a suspensor	58
3 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen grains stained with Alexander's stain	68
4.1 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination in the basic medium without sucrose	84
4.2 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination in the basic medium	85
4.3 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination in the basic medium showing a pollen tube bursting at the tip	86
4.4 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination in the basic medium showing pollen tube branching	87
4.5 <i>L.perezii</i> pollen germination in the basic medium showing two tubes from one pollen	88

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The genus *Limonium* belongs to the family Plumbaginaceae. According to Baker(1953b), there are more than 150 *Limonium* species. *Limonium* species are believed to originate from several regions of the northern hemisphere. The overall distribution of the genus embraces all five continents (Baker 1953b). *Limonium* was formerly called *Statice*, but in 1947 Lawrence' proposal was approved at the International Botany Conference and the generic name was changed to *Limonium* (Tsurushima 1992a).

Most *Limonium* species are perennial herbs or shrubs, sometimes woody at the stem base, although there are also some annuals (Huxley *et al.* 1992). Apart from species which become upright with an elongate stem, most *Limonium* species produce a circular cluster of leaves and exhibit a rosette form. The inflorescences of *Limonium* are mostly corymbose panicles or spikes (Huxley *et al.* 1992). *Limonium* species can be divided into two types: seasonal and free flowering types on the basis of their flowering patterns. Seasonally flowering species mainly flower during summer, while the flowering of free flowering species is influenced by temperature. The free flowering species will keep producing flowers throughout the year if temperature and light are favourable (Harada 1992). Flowers of *Limonium* possess a tubular calyx and five petals united only at the base. Both sepals and corolla are small, most flowers are only 3-4mm in diameter. The flowers of *L.perigrinum* are considered the largest, being 15-16mm in diameter (Tsurushima 1992a). The sepals of *Limonium* flowers often have as bright a colour as the corolla has and often persist to fruiting after the petals have senesced, so, when flower colour is described, it often means the colour of the sepal. Many *Limonium* species are presently grown commercially around the world for use as cut flowers. The unique branching inflorescences of *Limonium* are perfect as fillers for bouquets, corsages, baskets and other flower arrangements.

Limonium crops have a fast growing market in many countries. In Japan in 1985 the area under cultivation nationwide was 188 hectares. This had increased to 280 hectares by 1988 and it is now estimated to be approaching 400 hectares (Tsurushima 1992a). It should be pointed out that the most widely grown *Limonium* species for cut flowers is *L.sinuatum*. It makes up about 80% of the *Limonium* under cultivation in the world.

The remaining 20% is made up of other species (Tsurushima 1992a). To cope with a rapid increase in market demand for new and novel flowers, generation of interspecific hybrids has become a more popular strategy for producing new forms and colours. The first marketed interspecific *Limonium* hybrid was "Misty Blue" which was released by Dainchi Engei company in 1984. This hybrid was from a cross between *L. latifolium* and *L. caspia* (Tsurushima 1992b). "Lemon Star" is a yellow interspecific hybrid of *L. aureum* and *L. sinense*. "Charm Blue" is a hybrid grown from seedlings obtained from a cross between *L. latifolium* and *L. gmelinii* (Harada 1992). The significance of interspecific breeding is that it provides a way to combine the respective merits possessed by different species into a hybrid. Some objectives in breeding programs may include increasing the range of flower colours, increasing flower size, increasing stem length long stems and abundant flower production. In addition, features including year round production, heat resistance of plants, cold resistance, disease resistance and good water uptake are also the targets for breeders (Tsurushima 1992a).

Interspecific hybridization often relies on techniques such: *in vitro* techniques as embryo rescue, ovule and ovary culture, isolation and fusion of protoplasts. "Blue Star" was obtained by culturing embryos produced by hybridization between *L. perezii* and *L. sinense* (Tsurushima 1992b). Recently a long stemmed form of *L. perigrinum* was produced by hybridization with *L. purpuratum* (Morgan *et al.* in press).

A successful interspecific hybridization program not only relies on biotechnological techniques but also on the knowledge of morphological features of the sexual reproductive organ, flowers; the understanding of physiological features of the reproduction process; and the understanding of pollen behaviour in interspecific crosses. The main purpose of this study is to explore the possibilities of producing hybrids between several *Limonium* species. Six *Limonium* species were chosen for this present study. They were

L. perigrinum (Bergius)

L. sinuatum (L.) Mill

L. perezii (Stapt)

L. aureum (L.) Hill

L. sinense (Girard) Kuntze

L. caspia (*L. bellidifolium*)

The objectives of this work were:

- (1). To obtain knowledge about pollen behaviour on the stigmas and in the styles of related species.
- (2). To determine the barriers to interspecific crosses
- (3). To collect data for ovary, ovule and embryo growth in intraspecific crosses
- (4). To assess techniques for testing *Limonium* pollen "viability"
- (5). To investigate *Limonium* pollen germination *in vitro*
- (6). To obtain knowledge relevant to taxonomic relationships and mechanisms of breeding incongruities