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Weeds as Transitional Hosts of Phytopathogenic Fungi in Organic Vegetable Production

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Original scientific paper

SUMMARY

In practice, many weeds are frequently overlooked as sources of infection with a variety of plant diseases. This is especially true for diseases whose causative agents are transferred by weed seeds or can be found on weed roots and plant residues of weeds.

Specifically, because most cultivated plants have a one-year life cycle and

2023 .

21

1050

: *Penicillium*,
Fusarium, *Albugo*, *Alternaria*,
Cladosporium, *Bipolaris*, *Epicoccum*,
Rhizopus *Mucor*.

:

depart from arable land after harvesting, so do the causative agents of plant diseases.

Weeds present a distinct situation.

When crops are harvested, no attention is paid to them, allowing them to grow freely on agricultural land.

There have been no more detailed studies of the mycopopulation of weed plants in Serbia. In this article, we present the results of preliminary research.

Weed plant seed samples were gathered during the summer and autumn vegetative periods of 2023 in a vegetable crop developed using organic production practices.

Isolation was performed using standard phytopathological methods.

In these investigations on the mycopopulation of weed seeds, 1050 seeds from 21 weed species were investigated.

Morphological identification of fungi to genus was performed using standard keys.

A large percentage of fungi colonies formed around the seeds of weed plants.

In this way, nine different genera of fungi were determined, namely: *Penicillium*, *Fusarium*, *Albugo*, *Alternaria*, *Cladosporium*, *Bipolaris*, *Epicoccum*, *Rhizopus* and *Mucor*.

Key words: phytopathogenic fungi, weeds

INTRODUCTION

Weeds are plants that have accompanied man since ancient times. A general definition for a weed would be that it is a plant that has the following characteristics: the ability to germinate in a wide variety of conditions, rapid growth to the flowering stage, the ability to produce large quantities of long-lasting seeds that are dispersed over large areas, and have a high resistance to competition (Vrbni anin and Boži , 2021)

From an agricultural point of view, weeds would include all plants, not only wild but also cultivated, which grow against the farmer's wishes along with cultivated plants.

It often happens that during harvest, part of the seeds of the cultivated plant remain on the plot, and the same plants sprout in the following season, representing weeds in the next crop in the crop rotation.

On agricultural production areas, any plant that is not the purpose of cultivation is considered a weed (Vrbni anin and Boži , 2021).

Weed management in organic vegetable cultivation requires special attention because it is an essential and regularly used food in the human diet and must be health-safe.

Therefore, in the organic production of vegetables, plant diseases and crop pests, in addition to appropriate soil cultivation, proper crop rotation, the use of controlled planting material, the protection of useful plants and animals, the creation of favorable conditions for the development of natural enemies and

(Knežević et al., 2010; Vrbničanin and Božić, 2016; Vrbničanin and Božić, 2021).

(Hulina, 1993; Kačergius, 2003; Stojanović et al., 2010; Vrbničanin and Božić, 2021; Vasić et al., 2024).

physical and mechanical destruction, must also be suppressed by controlling weeds (Knežević et al., 2010; Vrbničanin and Božić, 2016; Vrbničanin and Božić, 2021).

At the same time, it is very important that weed control be timely and constant, because otherwise weeds cause significant damage to the crop and surrounding crops, during the vegetation period of growing the crop as well as during the following vegetation periods.

A comprehensive approach to weed protection is only possible if we understand under what conditions the presence of weeds in a certain culture causes damage and whether it is economically profitable to implement weed protection measures.

It also includes a long-term approach to solving the weed problem, because only by implementing high-quality preventive measures in combination with weed control is it possible to significantly mitigate the damage caused by weeds in one crop (Hulina, 1993; Kačergius, 2003; Stojanović et al., 2010; Vrbničanin and Božić, 2021; Vasić et al., 2024).

Weeds are typically not controlled after the harvest of the cultivated crop.

Thus, they continue to grow unhindered on agricultural land, becoming dangerous hosts for a large number of plant diseases and sources of constant infection, because disease-causing agents move from them to cultivated plants.

Also, ruderal weeds that grow outside agricultural areas, in neglected gardens and along roads can be hosts of plant diseases and a source of infection of cultivated plants.

The aim of our work is to study the mycopopulation on weed plants during the organic production of tomatoes and peppers in open space, because weeds are present in the pepper and tomato crop and are vectors of harmful fungi in all surrounding crops, especially in vegetable crops.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Samples of weed seeds were collected in the village of Trnava (near Kruševac), Serbia, from the plot of the Živkovi family during the summer growing season and from the land in the autumn growing season of 2023, where peppers and tomatoes were grown according to the principles of organic production.

Surrounding the vegetable garden were cornfields.

The experiment was conducted in the phytopathological laboratory of the Faculty of Agriculture in Kruševac, University of Niš.

Seeds of 21 weed species were collected. In this experiment, phytopathogenic mycopopulation was studied on 1050 seeds, 21 selected weed species.

Wash the weed seeds thoroughly under running water.

After washing, weed seeds are ready for isolation.

Prepared seed samples were disinfected with 96% ethanol for 10 seconds and 1% sodium hypochlorite

(NaOCl) 1
 (PDA)
 25°C.
 3
 14
 PDA
 PDA.
 Olympus CX31.
 Vrande i et al. (2011):

(NaOCl) for 1 minute, and then washed three times in sterile distilled water. They were then dried on sterile filter paper and placed on potato dextrose agar (PDA) medium with streptomycin.

Ten seeds per weed species were placed in Petri dishes in five replicates. They were kept in a thermostat at 25°C.

Observations were made every 3 days, and most mycelial samples were developed for up to 14 days.

The developed mycelium was examined on a new PDA substrate, and after initial growth, the mycelial tip was reseeded on the PDA.

Microscopic examination was performed using Olympus CX31 microscopes.

Morphological identification of fungi to genus was done using a standard key.

Calculated isolation frequency in percentage using the formula Vrande i et al. (2011):

$$\text{Isolation frequency (\%)} = \frac{\text{Number of segments containing the fungal species}}{\text{Total number of segments used in the isolation}} \times 100$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During these investigations of the mycopopulation of weed plant seeds, a total of 1050 seeds originating from 21 weed species were examined. These are the most common weeds present in tomato and pepper crops: *Rumex obtusifolius* L., *Rumex crispus* L., *Ballota nigra* L., *Hibiscus trionum* L., *Amaranthus retroflexus* L., *Daucus carota* L., *Xanthium strumarium* L., *Plantago*

strumarium L., *Plantago lanceolata* L., *Plantago major* L., *Portulaca oleracea* L., *Urtica dioica* L., *Eleusine indica* (L.) Gaertn., *Artemisia vulgaris* L., *Prunella vulgaris* L., *Datura stramonium* L., *Anthemis arvensis* L., *Clematis vitalba* L., *Raphanus raphanistrum* L., *Solanum nigrum* L., *Salvia verticillata* L. *Saponaria officinalis* L.

(1).

: *Penicillium*, *Fusarium*, *Albugo*, *Alternaria*, *Cladosporium*, *Bipolaris*, *Epicoccum*, *Rhizopus* *Mucor*.
Fusarium, *Alternaria*, *Albugo*, *Cladosporium*, *Bipolaris* *Epicoccum*

Penicillium, *Rhizopus* , *Mucor*

lanceolata L., *Plantago major* L., *Portulaca oleracea* L., *Urtica dioica* L., *Eleusine indica* (L.) Gaertn., *Artemisia vulgaris* L., *Prunella vulgaris* L., *Datura stramonium* L., *Anthemis arvensis* L., *Clematis vitalba* L., *Raphanus raphanistrum* L., *Solanum nigrum* L., *Salvia verticillata* L. and *Saponaria officinalis* L.

A large percentage of fungal colonies formed around the seeds of weed plants (Table 1).

On that occasion, nine different genera of fungi were determined: *Penicillium*, *Fusarium*, *Albugo*, *Alternaria*, *Cladosporium*, *Bipolaris*, *Epicoccum*, *Rhizopus* and *Mucor*. Of which the genera *Fusarium*, *Alternaria*, *Albugo*, *Cladosporium*, *Bipolaris* and *Epicoccum* can cause great damage to cultivated plants in the field, and the genera *Penicillium*, *Rhizopus* and *Mucor* can cause significant damage to stored products.

1.

Table 1. Frequency of fungal isolation on weed species

Weed species	Number of samples Plant part – seeds	Fungi species	Isolation frequency (%)
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	28
		<i>Fusarium</i> sp.	30
		<i>Mucor</i> sp.	6
<i>Rumex crispus</i> L.	50	<i>Cladosporium</i> sp.	14
		<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	20
<i>Ballota nigra</i> L.	50	<i>Rhizopus</i> sp.	12
		<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	30
		<i>Albugo</i> sp.	12
<i>Hibiscus trionum</i> L.	50	<i>Penicillium</i> sp.	26
		<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	24
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i> L.	50	<i>Epicoccum</i> sp.	20
		<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	20
<i>Plantago major</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	8
		<i>Rhizopus</i> sp.	6
		<i>Mucor</i> sp.	4
		<i>Bipolaris</i> sp.	16

<i>Xanthium strumarium</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Penicillium</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp. <i>Rhizopus</i> sp.	8 10 22 6
<i>Amaranthus retroflexus</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Fusarium</i> sp.	50 30
<i>Daucus carota</i> L.	50	<i>Epicoccum</i> sp. <i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Albugo</i> sp.	14 36 10
<i>Portulaca oleracea</i> L.	50	<i>Penicillium</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp.	24 10
<i>Urtica dioica</i> L.	50	<i>Epicoccum</i> sp. <i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Penicillium</i> sp.	14 16 6
<i>Eleusine indica</i> (L.) Gaertn.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Penicillium</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp.	10 20 16
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp. <i>Fusarium</i> sp. <i>Epicoccum</i> sp.	20 10 6 16
<i>Datura stramonium</i> L.	50	<i>Mucor</i> sp. <i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Fusarium</i> sp.	14 14 22
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Penicillium</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp. <i>Fusarium</i> sp. <i>Epicoccum</i> sp.	14 14 6 10 10
<i>Clematis vitalba</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Penicillium</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp.	10 24 20
<i>Anthemis arvensis</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Albugo</i> sp. <i>Fusarium</i> sp.	20 14 16
<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp. <i>Epicoccum</i> sp.	24 10 18
<i>Solanum nigrum</i> L.	50	<i>Fusarium</i> sp. <i>Epicoccum</i> sp. <i>Alternaria</i> sp.	16 12 10
<i>Salvia verticillata</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Penicillium</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp. <i>Mucor</i> sp.	24 14 20 8
<i>Saponaria officinalis</i> L.	50	<i>Alternaria</i> sp. <i>Penicillium</i> sp. <i>Cladosporium</i> sp. <i>Fusarium</i> sp.	26 8 22 38

(Uredinales),

(*Uromyces pisi*),

Of the fungal diseases, a large part also parasitizes or lives part of its life on weeds.

Perhaps the best example is with some rusts (Uredinales), such as pea rust (*Uromyces pisi*), which spends part of its life cycle (uredostadium and

(uredostadium and teleutostadium) *Euphorbia cyparissias* (*Puccinia pruni-spinosae*) *Anemone* sp.

(*Gymnosporangium sabinae*), (telio stadium) (*Juniperus oxycedrus*)

Juniperus,

(*Plasmodiophora brassicae*),

(*Capsella bursa pastoris*), (*Raphanus raphanistrum*), (*Sinapis arvensis*)

(Peronosporales),

(*Taraxacum officinale*), (*Sonchus oleraceus*), (*Cirsium arvense*)

(Poaceae)

(Hulina, 1993; Ivanovi and Ivanovi, 2001; Ka ergius, 2003; Stojanovi et al., 2010; Kneževi et al., 2010; Vrbni anin and Boži, 2021; Triolet et al., 2022.) *Sclerotinia trifoliarum*

Ranunculus repens, *Holosteum umbellatum*, *Capsella*

teleutostadium) on weeds such as *Euphorbia cyparissias* or stone plum rust (*Puccinia pruni-spinosae*) resides on *Anemone* sp.

There is also a known case of pear rust (*Gymnosporangium sabinae*), which spends part of its life (telio stadium) on pine or juniper (*Juniperus oxycedrus*) or some ornamental species from the genus *Juniperus*, and from them it moves to pear in the spring.

It is known that some pathogenic fungi, for example the causative agent of cabbage looper on cabbage (*Plasmodiophora brassicae*), also develop on the roots of other solitary cruciferous plants, such as shepherd's purse (*Capsella bursa pastoris*), wild radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum*), wild mustard (*Sinapis arvensis*) and others, so it is necessary to remove them from cabbage plants.

Also, some downy mildew (Peronosporales), for example lettuce downy mildew common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), common sowthistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and others as hosts.

Some weedy grasses are hosts to various fungal diseases that occur on cereals, which are in the same grass family (Poaceae) as those weeds.

This is the most common case with some rusts and powdery mildews (Hulina, 1993; Ivanovi and Ivanovi, 2001; Ka ergius, 2003; Stojanovi et al., 2010; Kneževi et al., 2010; Vrbni anin and Boži, 2021; Triolet et al., 2022.).

The fungus *Sclerotinia trifoliarum* parasitizes numerous weeds such as *Ranunculus repens*, *Holosteum umbellatum*, *Capsella bursa pastoris*,

<p><i>bursa pastoris</i>, <i>Veronica persica</i>, <i>Plantago lanceolata</i>, <i>Senecio vulgaris</i>, <i>Sonchus</i> spp. <i>Taraxacum officinale</i>.</p>	<p><i>Veronica persica</i>, <i>Plantago lanceolata</i>, <i>Senecio vulgaris</i>, <i>Sonchus</i> spp. and <i>Taraxacum officinale</i>. Through the weeds, the fungus can spread further, causing the very dangerous disease clover cancer.</p>
<p><i>Albugo candida</i>, <i>Erysimum crassicaule</i> (Triolet et al., 2022.).</p>	<p>This disease causes great losses to crops of different types of clover, alfalfa, asparagus and broad beans. <i>Albugo candida</i>, the causal agent of white rust disease, is reported on <i>Erysimum crassicaule</i> (Triolet et al., 2022.).</p>
<p>Vasi et al. (2024) <i>Penicillium</i>, <i>Fusarium</i>, <i>Alternaria</i>, <i>Cladosporium</i>, <i>Epicoccum</i>, <i>Rhizopus</i> <i>Mucor</i>.</p>	<p>Vasi et al. (2024) tested the most common weeds in vegetable production. A high percentage of fungal colonies formed around the weed seeds. In that context, seven different genera of fungi were identified: <i>Penicillium</i>, <i>Fusarium</i>, <i>Alternaria</i>, <i>Cladosporium</i>, <i>Epicoccum</i>, <i>Rhizopus</i> and <i>Mucor</i>.</p>
<p>Brassicaceae, (Mirzaee et al., 2009). <i>Agropyron repens</i></p>	<p>The host plant is a desert therophyte belonging to the Brassicaceae and is distributed in Iran and Pakistan (Mirzaee et al., 2009). Couch grass – <i>Agropyron repens</i> can host numerous phytoparasitic fungi.</p>
<p><i>Puccinia glumarum</i>, <i>P. graminis</i>. <i>P. coronifera</i>, <i>Pseudocercospora herpotrichoides</i>, <i>Blumeria graminis</i>, <i>Claviceps purpurea</i> <i>Gaeumannomyces graminis</i>. <i>Alternaria brassicae</i></p>	<p>These are the fungi <i>Puccinia glumarum</i>, <i>P. graminis</i>. <i>P. coronifera</i>, <i>Pseudocercospora herpotrichoides</i>, <i>Blumeria graminis</i>, <i>Claviceps purpurea</i> and <i>Gaeumannomyces graminis</i>. The fungus <i>Alternaria brassicae</i> attacks cabbage, cauliflower, oilseed rape, but also other cruciferous vegetables, even weeds, on the roots in the form of conidia during the winter and thus the infection is renewed the following year (Stojanovi et al., 2010; Kneževi et al., 2010).</p>
<p>(Stojanovi et al., 2010; Kneževi et al., 2010).</p>	

CONCLUSIONS

In this experiment, the preliminary results of the research of the mycopopulation of the seeds of weed plants in the crop of tomatoes and peppers produced according to organic principles are presented.

Fungi from nine genera were isolated on the seeds of the examined weed plants originating from pepper and tomato crops. Of these, fungi from the genera *Penicillium*, *Albugo*, *Cladosporium*, *Bipolaris*, *Epicoccum*, *Rhizopus* and *Mucor* belong to the group of saprophytic fungi, while the genera *Alternaria* and *Fusarium* are pathogenic fungi (causing fruit rot of peppers and tomatoes and wilting of plants).

In all the seeds of weed plants that we treated in our research, fungi from the genus *Alternaria* were isolated in varying percentages, from 8 to 50%, depending on the weed species.

Fungi from the genus *Fusarium* isolated from eight weed species (*Rumex obtusifolius* L., *Anthemis arvensis* L., *Solanum nigrum* L., *Saponaria officinalis* L., *Artemisia vulgaris* L., *Amaranthus retroflexus* L., *Datura stramonium* L., *Prunella vulgaris* L.) from 8 to 38%.

Investigations of the mycopopulation of weed plants are important in order to determine which weed plants and in what percentage pathogenic fungi occur in organic vegetable production, which can cause significant economic damage.

It is known that a large number of pathogenic fungi from the genera *Alternaria* and *Fusarium* parasitize peppers and tomatoes and cause significant damage.

Penicillium, *Albugo*, *Cladosporium*,
Bipolaris, *Epicoccum*, *Rhizopus*
Mucor

Alternaria *Fusarium*
(
)

Alternaria
8 50%,

Fusarium,

(*Rumex obtusifolius* L., *Anthemis arvensis* L., *Solanum nigrum* L., *Saponaria officinalis* L., *Artemisia vulgaris* L., *Amaranthus retroflexus* L., *Datura stramonium* L., *Prunella vulgaris* L.), 8 38%.

Alternaria *Fusarium*

In conventional production, fungicides are used to control pathogenic fungi, while they are not used in organic production.

For these reasons, it is necessary to study microeculation on weed plants in an organic cultivation system. Precisely in order to reduce the infectious potential of these parasites and prevent the possibility of their spreading from weeds to cultivated plants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovations of the Republic of Serbia, contract 451-03-65/2024-03/ 200383.

451-03-65/2024-03/ 200383.

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