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Parthenocarpy in Vegetable Crops: Enhancing Yield and Quality

Shashank Shekhar, Dr. Vaishali Gangwar and Dr. Shweta Soni

Introduction:

Parthenocarpy, derived from the Greek words "parthenos" (virgin) and "karpos" (fruit), refers to the development of fruit without fertilization. In vegetable crops, parthenocarpy has gained considerable attention due to its potential to enhance yield, improve fruit quality, and mitigate the impact of environmental stressors. This phenomenon has been harnessed through breeding and biotechnological approaches to benefit various vegetable crops.

Understanding Parthenocarpy:

Traditional fruit development involves fertilization, where pollen from male structures fertilizes the ovules in the female reproductive organs, leading to seed formation. Parthenocarpy, however, allows fruit to develop without the need for pollination or fertilization, resulting in seedless fruits. This process can occur naturally in some plant species, while in others, it can be induced through genetic modifications or hormonal treatments.

Benefits of Parthenocarpy in Vegetable Crops:

1. **Increased Yield:** Parthenocarpic plants often exhibit enhanced fruit set, leading to higher overall yields. Since seed development is not required, more energy is directed towards fruit growth, resulting in a larger and more abundant harvest.
2. **Consistent Fruit Production:** Parthenocarpy can contribute to a more consistent fruit set, irrespective of environmental conditions or pollinator availability. This trait is particularly advantageous in regions with unpredictable weather patterns or where pollinators may be scarce.
3. **Improved Fruit Quality:** Seedless fruits produced through parthenocarpy are often preferred by consumers for their better taste, texture, and appearance. Seedless varieties can reduce post-harvest processing and contribute to a more enjoyable eating experience.
4. **Resistance to Stress:** Parthenocarpy can confer stress tolerance in vegetable crops. Plants subjected to adverse conditions such as high temperatures, drought, or low light intensity may still produce fruits, ensuring

Shashank Shekhar[1], Dr. Vaishali Gangwar[2] and Dr. Shweta Soni[3]
[1]M.Sc. (Horti.) Vegetable Science, Banda University of Agriculture and Technology, Banda, UP
[2]Assistant Professor, Banda University of Agriculture and Technology, Banda, UP
[3]Assistant Professor, Banda University of Agriculture and Technology, Banda, UP

a certain level of yield even under challenging circumstances.

Applications and Examples:

1. **Cucumber (Cucumis sativus):** Parthenocarpic cucumber varieties have been developed to ensure consistent fruit production, especially in greenhouse environments where pollinators may be limited. Parthenocarpic cucumber does not require pollination, even though, it is a cross-pollinated crop. Combination of parthenocarpy and gynoecism gave added advantage of yield and palatability of cucumber (Denna, 1973).
2. **Tomato (Solanum lycopersicum):** Seedless tomatoes resulting from parthenocarpy are widely used in processed foods and salads. Genetic engineering has played a role in developing parthenocarpic tomato varieties. The parthenocarpic tomato does not require removal of seed during processing.
   - Seedless tomatoes have 1% more dry matter, more sugars, less acidity, less cellulose and more soluble solids than seeded cultivars (Lukyanenko, 1991).
3. **Eggplant (Solanum melongena):** Parthenocarpic eggplants have been developed to improve fruit yield and quality, offering a solution for regions where pollination may be challenging. In eggplant, parthenocarpy improves fruit quality and reduces the labour needed for its out-of-season cultivation. Since the commercial ripeness of eggplant fruits precedes its physiological maturity, the presence of seeds considerably depreciates the value of fruits for both fresh and processed market. The negative effects associated with the presence of seeds have a faster and more intense browning of the fruit flesh upon cutting, increased saponin and solasonin compounds causing bitter taste and hard flesh. The absence of seeds increased the shelf life of the fruits for better conservation (Aubert et al., 1989).

Challenges and Future Prospects:

Despite its numerous benefits, parthenocarpy in vegetable crops also poses challenges. The lack of seeds can affect the natural dispersal and adaptation of the plant species. Additionally, the potential risk of decreased genetic diversity due to the propagation of seedless varieties should be carefully monitored.

Future research may focus on refining parthenocarpic traits in various vegetable crops and addressing concerns related to genetic diversity. Advances in biotechnology and breeding techniques can further enhance the efficiency and applicability of parthenocarpy, contributing to sustainable and resilient agriculture.

Conclusion:

Parthenocarpy in vegetable crops represents a promising avenue for improving yield, quality, processing traits and stress resistance. As agriculture faces the challenges of a changing climate and increasing demand for food, harnessing the benefits of parthenocarpy can contribute to the development of resilient and productive crop varieties, ensuring a more secure and sustainable food supply. This trait proved highly useful in green house cultivation, particularly cross-pollinated vegetable crops. This is established fact that phytohormones play important role in fruit setting, however, their genetic manipulation can lead in development of seedlessness.