Germination behavior of *Jatropha curcas* L. after different imbibition times

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# ABSTRACT

*Jatropha curcas* is an important specie for production of biofuel and the plant can survive even in drought condition. For an adequate establishment in the field is necessary that seed have good quality in vigor and viability. We studied the seed water relation to performed an experiment with different imbibition time from 0 to 24 hours in deionized water. Imbibed seeds were sown in polietilene containers with 1200 g of sand. The germination was recorded every day for 25 days. Seed with 1 cm radicle under the soil was considered as germinated. To determinate seed water content, 10 seeds were weighed in fresh, turgid and dry weight (104°C for 24 hours). Our results show that exist decrease in the germinability of the seeds according to an increase in seed imbibition time. Freshly seeds contained about 8-10% and after 24 hours of imbibition, the water content in the seeds were around 60%. This study suggest that *J. curcas* don’t need previously water imbibition in order to improve germination percentage in seed with an initial water moisture less than 8%.

**Key words:** biofuel, seed water content, seed moisture, germinability

# Introduction

*Jatropha curcas* L. belongs to the family Euphorbiaceae, is native to the American tropics [1]. It is a small tree but it can reach 6 meters or more. *J. curcas* is a seed-bearing plant and can produce 1,500 to 2,000 kg of seed per hectare/year or 540 to 680 liters of biofuel per hectare, considering that *J. curcas* seeds contain about 40% to 58% of oil [2, 3]. Moreover, the *J. curcas* is a non-edible, eco-friendly, non-toxic, biodegradable fuel-producing plant has attracted worldwide attention as an alternate sustainable energy source for the future [4-7]. In general, more than 95% of the oil produced for biodiesel purposes comes from edible oils, which can have a negative impact on food production (khan et al., [2014](#ref-khan_2014)). Thus, *J. curcas* seeds are a good source of oil and it has great economic potential as an alternative biofuel.

The seeds of *J. curcas* have a short viability period and they are more sensitive to salinity at germination [8, 9]. *J. curcas* is drought tolerant [10-14] and probably also as salinity tolerant (Lozano-Isla, manuscript in preparation). The species can be cultivated on marginal and salt affected areas, without competing with crop food production [9, 15, 16]. Seed deterioration is a natural and irreversible process, even under ideal storage conditions [8, 17-19]. Dry seeds suffer a variety of biochemical and metabolic changes, including lipid peroxidation, enzyme inactivation and rupture of cellular membranes (Lozano-Isla, manuscript in preparation).

In arid environments, the water needed for germination is available for only short periods and consequently, successful crop establishment depends not only on rapid and uniform germination of the seed, but also on the ability of the seed to germinate under low water availability [20]. The speed and uniformity of seed germination are prominent parameters especially for field crop seeds to compete with weed seeds [21]. Water uptake is the fundamental requirement for the initiation and completion of seed germination (Koornneef, Bentsink, & Hilhorst, [2002](#ref-Koornneef2002Seed)). Studies on germination and seedling establishment which are the critical stages in the plant life cycle and in *J. curcas* has not been conducted so far. Knowledge of the capacity of the species to complete this stage successfully is fundamental for crop production [22]. Considerable variation was registered in *J. curcas* for seed germination, seedling growth and biomass parameters. The small value of error or environmental variances of the seedling growth traits suggests that majority of characters are under genetic control [23].

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the behavior of *J. curcas* seeds under different imbibition time, seed water relation and aspects about germination.

# Materials and methods

## Plant material

The experiment was carried out with *Jatropha curcas* seeds. The seeds presented 72% viability and they were collected in 2016 and stored as recommended by Moncaleano-Escandon, Silva [8].

## Seed imbibition test and water relation

The seeds was distributed in 52 frasks (400 mL) with 25 seed for each experimental unit in a controlled room at 25°C. For each frask was applied 100 ml deionized water according to the imbibition treatment (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22 and 24 hours). The pH (W3B, Bel Engineering, Italy) and electrical conductivity (CD-4306, Lutron, Taiwan) were evaluated with 20 mL of soaking solution for each treatment. For seed water content in each 52 frasks (100 mL) was applied 50 mL deionized water and were added 10 seed previously weight in an analytic scale according to different imbibition time. After each treatment was take the seeds imbibition weight and putted in papers bags for oven at 104°C for 24 hours and determinate seeds dry weight. The water relation variables were calculated according the following formulas: and . Where is seed moisture, is seed water content, is seed dry weight, is seed fresh weight and is seed turgid weight.

## Germination test

The 25 seed from each treatment was sowing in polietilene trays content 1000 g of river sand at field capacity (1300 g). The seed was uniform distributed in the tray and covered with  
200 g sand. The germination experiment was carried out in greenhouse condition with average temperature of 27.5°C and 78% relative humidity. Seed germination was evaluated daily according to agronomic criteria consider germinated seed when the radicle had emerged about 1 cm above the surface of sowing media. When no germination was observed in all treatments at least in five consecutive days, the germination was considered completed (Moncaleano-Escandon et al., [2013](#ref-Moncaleano2013Germination)).

## Data analysis

The experimental was carried out in a completely randomized design with 13 treatments of imbibition times (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22 and 24 hours) with four replications with seeds of *J. curcas*. The germination variables was calculated according the GerminaR R package [24]. Statistical analysis and generation of graphs were performed in the statistical software R [25]. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to evaluate the differences between the factors and the comparison of the means with the Student-Newman-Keuls test (p <0.05) [26]. For the multivariate analysis, correlation analysis was performed [25, 26] and principal components analysis were made [27].

# Results

## Electrical conductivity and pH

The water solution from the soaked seeds show variation under the imbibition time for electrical conductivity (EC) and pH, Figure 1 A-B. The pH range had a variation from 7.7 to 5.1 showing a significate difference between the different imbibition time with a reduction of the pH in the time (r = -0.88, p<0.05), Figure 1 A. In other way, the EC show an increase in relation to imbibition time (r = 0.80, p<0.05) with value ranges from 0.021 to 0.69 dS m−1, Figure 1 B. According the correlation analysis exits a negative correlation between EC and pH (r = -0.74, p<0.05).

## Seed water relation

The seed moisture was 7.9% in freshly seeds, but it arrive until 9.5% after 24 hours of imbibition (Figure 1 C). The seed moisture show a strong positive correlation with the imbibition time (r = 0.89, p<0.05). While the seed water content show a fast increase until the first two hour of imbibition the seed arrives to 25.7% of water content, afterwards these moment the water content in the seeds increase continuously to arrive around 59.2% in 24 hours (Figure 1 D). There was an increase in the water content around 6.5 times from freshly to hydrated seeds; this results were supported for a high correlation between imbibition time with the water content (r = 0.93, p<0.05). While exist a high correlation is (0.96, p<0.05) between seed moisture and seed water content.

## Seed germination analyses

Germinability of the seeds of *Jatropha curcas* had a significant decrease since the 2 hours of imbibition with an initial germination of 85%. After that, the range of germinability were between 68 to 44% from 02 to 24 hour of imbibition (Figure 2 A). Germinability show a strong negative correlation with imbibition time (r = -0.72, p<0.05). The mean germination time in freshly seed has a major value with 4.8 day in comparative with the other treatment with values around 5.9 to 7.1 day for germination between 02 to 24 hours of imbibition (Figure 2 B). Seed germinability presented a negative strong correlation with a mean germination time (r = −0.88, p<0.05). The germination synchrony show values from 1.9 to 2.3 without difference between the imbibition times (Figure 2 C). The maximum value for the uncertainty in germination for the experiment was 4.6 bits, results that don't shows any trend according the imbibition time. The germination uncertainty had values from 1.9 to 2.3 bits. The germination synchrony show a high correlation with the germination uncertainty  
(r = −0.92, p<0.05).

## Multivariate analyses

The principal component analysis according to the studied variables explain 75.03% of the variance between the first and second dimension. In the first dimension exist high positive correlation (p<0.05) between ELC (r = 0.97), SWC (r = 0.96), SMT (r = 0.91), STW   
(r = 0.91), IBTH (r = 0.87), MGT (r = 0.82) with a negative correlation with the GRP  
(r = -0.92) while in the second dimension SFW (r = 0.77), SDW (r = 0.71) present positive correlation in contrast with HPT (r = -0.75) with negative correlation.

# Discussion

This study found that exist a reduction in the seed germination of *J. curcas* according to seed water imbibition. It is suppose that seeds need a small amount of water for promote the germination because the seeds submitted to water imbibition had linearly decrease the germinability and an increase its mean germination time parameters related to the seed vigor. These phenomena was previously reported in corn seeds [28]. Also is observed during the time line of the experiment there was an increase in EC that reflect in lost the seed germinability from seed steeping in water from 2 to 24 hours.

The seeds used in this experiment were stored in dry environments and hence have very low levels of metabolism. During imbibition of water, they swell and metabolic activity increases. Hydration of tissue components during imbibition takes place in a not controlled way so that the reconstruction of internal structures of the cells and organelles was affected. So leakage of stored components and enzymes, colouring, cracking or absence of cotyledons, and overall damage to the hypocotyl may occur during germination [29, 30]. The amount of the constituents of the leaked depended unequivocally on the initial water content of seeds; the lower moisture in seed at the initial water content show more leakage that no occur with seeds with the initial water content of 24.2% [31]. This damage takes place in the early stages of imbibition [32]. This indicates that membrane functions are restored, even though the activities of respiration and metabolism are restricted. Water molecules are semi bound and that mobile water necessary for metabolism is deficient for moisture contents between 12-24% [33]. According to these, the loss of viability can be explain for the initial seed water content of the seeds used in these experiment because they had an initial moisture around 8%. It is low water content according to moisture in harvest that is around 18% [2]; a possible explanation for this could be the degree of maturation of the seeds of this study compared to the study of Pompelli, Ferreira [2]. Also in other crops like soybean seeds, water content is usually 10 to 20% at harvest and falls further during storage, seed water contents below 10% were shown to be desirable for long period storage because seeds stop their biological activities and the stored materials are consumed at a minimum level [20]. *J. curcas* seeds after 24 hour of imbibition arrive 6.5 times initial moisture as reported in soybean seeds [31]. Dried seeds can raise their water content to a certain level, two or three times the dry weight, and this rapid increase of water is often accompanied by some deterioration of the tissues, called imbibitional damage. This damage is expressed as a reduced rate of germination and reduced yield of surviving plants. It can be the reason in decrease in the germination percentage in this research. It was reported that soybean seeds with the water content below 13% suffered seriously from imbibitional damage while those above 17% did not, where respiration and metabolic activity rapidly increase with the increase of moisture content [31, 34]. Imbibition damage results from the rapid entry of water into the cotyledons during imbibition, leading to cell death and high solute leakage from the seeds [35] and the extensive loss of cellular material and enzymes from the seeds [36, 37] indicates extensive membrane disruption. The electrical conductivity was related with seed water content and the germination for these reason EC tests has been applied to detect vigor differences in many other grain legumes and indeed some other species [8, 38]. The conductivity will increase as the laboratory germination falls, in addition to the reduced ability of germination seeds to retain cell contents [28]. In many reports on peas, the EC readings for lots have been found to relate significantly to field emergence [36, 39].

To alleviate of the effects of soaking injury as a result of the increase in the moisture content of seeds before imbibition is related to the reduced binding energy of water molecules and the appearance of respiratory activity [34]. Slow and controlled hydration is essential as the first step in the reactivation of metabolic processes in the dry seed, leading to germination and growth. The EC vigor test would be developed and standardized for these species [35, 40, 41]. Furthermore was reported than the relationship between field emergence and EC turned out to be not only interesting, but useful in practical seed technology [28] as present in these work for *J. curcas*.

# Conclusions

The initial water content in *J. curcas* seeds should be consider because it will be alter the seed germination according to the imbibition time. The measurement of EC could be have a role alongside ageing based vigor tests, like the accelerated ageing and controlled deterioration tests, by giving a measure of viability following ageing in 24 hours in place of a germination test around 15 to 30 days or longer in *J. curcas*.

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**Figures**

**Figure 01:** Response of *Jatropha curcas* seeds after different imbibition time. (A) pH; (B) Electrical conductivity; (C) Seed moisture and (D) Seed water content. The letter represent the mean difference with Student-Newman-Keuls test (p = 0.05). Means are represent with (±SE). n = 4.

**Figure 02:** (A) Germination (%); (B) Mean germination time (days); (C) Germination synchrony and (D) Germination uncertainty (bits) in *Jatropha curcas* seeds after different imbibition times. The letter represent the mean difference with Student-Newman-Keuls test (p = 0.05). Means are represent with (±SE). n = 4.

**Figure 03:** Principal Component Analysis from the variables in *Jatropha curcas* seeds after different imbibition times. Where: IBTH, imbibition time; GRP, germination percentage; MGT, mean germination time; SYN, germination synchrony; pH, potential of hydrogen; EC, electrical conductivity; SWC, seed water content; SMT, seed moisture.