**Title**: Soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation with *Bradyrhizobium japonicum* shapes tradeoffs between whole plant growth and leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs in *Glycine max* L.

**Running Head:**

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**Abstract**

Relationships between soil nutrient availability, leaf nutrient allocation, and photosynthetic capacity are commonly observed in nature. Recent work leveraging photosynthetic least-cost theory suggests leaf nutrient allocation and photosynthetic capacity can be predicted independent of soil nutrient availability and is instead driven by leaf nutrient demand to build and maintain photosynthetic enzymes. However, leaf nutrient demand to build and maintain photosynthetic enzymes may depend on species’ nutrient acquisition strategy or whole plant nutrient demand to build and maintain structures that support whole plant growth. In this study, we measured leaf and whole plant traits of *Glycine max* L. (Merr.) grown under two soil nitrogen fertilization treatments both with and without inoculation with *Bradyrhizobium japonicum* in a full factorial greenhouse experiment. After seven weeks of growth, soil nitrogen fertilization decreased photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency, increased intrinsic water-use efficiency, and increased leaf nitrogen allocation per stomatal conductance, supporting nitrogen-water use tradeoffs commonly observed in photosynthetic least-cost frameworks. We also found that soil nitrogen fertilization had a strong positive effect on total leaf area and whole plant biomass, which may have dampened the effect of these treatments on leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs. We found no effect of inoculation on leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs; however, did observe a strong effect of inoculation on structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen, total leaf area, and leaf nitrogen allocation under low soil nitrogen environments. These findings indicate that soil nitrogen availability is more important in determining leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs. They also indicate that associations with symbiotic nitrogen-fixing bacteria do not modify nitrogen-water use tradeoffs but may instead contribute to a stimulation in whole plant photosynthesis through an increase in total leaf area.

**Keywords**

Nitrogen fixation; photosynthetic least-cost theory; whole plant growth; greenhouse; crops; nutrient acquisition strategy

**Introduction**

Photosynthesis provides food, fiber, shelter, and fuel to terrestrial systems, and represents the largest carbon flux between the atmosphere and biosphere (Chapin, 2003; IPCC, 2013). The photosynthetic reactions that underpin the provisioning of these ecosystem services are regulated by ecosystem carbon and nutrient biogeochemical cycles (Hungate et al., 2003; LeBauer & Treseder, 2008). Specifically, plants use nutrient-dense photosynthetic enzymes to fix carbon dioxide into simple sugars, which are accumulated as biomass, lost through respiration, or shuttled belowground to acquire nutrients via direct uptake or through symbioses with mycorrhizal fungi and symbiotic nitrogen-fixing bacteria (S. E. Smith & Read, 2008; Taiz & Zeiger, 2010).

Terrestrial biosphere models are sensitive to the formulation of photosynthesis (Bonan et al., 2011; Booth et al., 2012; N. G. Smith et al., 2016, 2017; Ziehn et al., 2011), and therefore must be represented using robust, well-tested processes (Oreskes et al., 1994; Prentice et al., 2015; Wieder et al., 2019). Many current generation terrestrial biosphere models predict leaf-level photosynthesis using parameters assigned by plant functional type through linear relationships between soil nutrient availability, leaf nutrient allocation, and photosynthetic capacity (Rogers, 2014; Rogers et al., 2017; N. G. Smith & Dukes, 2013). These models predict leaf nutrient allocation from soil nutrient availability based on the assumption that increasing soil nutrient availability generally increases leaf nutrient allocation (Firn et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2020), which can correspond with an increase in photosynthetic capacity (Li et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2020).

While empirical support for positive relationships between soil nutrient availability, leaf nutrient allocation, and photosynthetic capacity is extensive (Brix, 1971; Evans, 1989; Evans & Seemann, 1989; Firn et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2014), the assumption that these relationships are linearly related does not consider the fact that plants acclimate to their environment, which can modify leaf nutrient allocation and photosynthetic capacity independent of soil nutrient availability (Onoda et al., 2017; N. G. Smith & Dukes, 2013; add more here). Indeed, recent work suggests that leaf nutrient allocation and photosynthetic capacity can be predicted independent of soil nutrient availability, and can instead be predicted by aboveground climate, leaf traits, or other edaphic characteristics such as soil pH (Dong et al., 2017, 2020; Maire et al., 2015; Paillassa et al., 2020; N. G. Smith et al., 2019). These studies call the generality of positive relationships between soil nutrient availability, leaf nutrient allocation, and photosynthetic capacity into question, and imply that leaf nutrient allocation and photosynthetic capacity may be better predicted through factors that influence leaf nutrient demand to build and maintain photosynthetic enzymes (Dong et al., 2022)

Photosynthetic least-cost theory provides a framework for understanding how leaf nutrient demand to build and maintain photosynthetic enzymes modifies leaf nutrient allocation and photosynthetic capacity. First principles of the theory suggest that plants acclimate to environments by maximizing photosynthetic carbon uptake at the lowest summed cost of water and nitrogen use (Prentice et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2003). The theory predicts that costs of water and nutrient use are substitutable, such that plants can maintain the lowest summed cost of water and nitrogen use by sacrificing less efficient use of a relatively more abundant and less costly resource to use in exchange for more efficient use of a relatively less abundant and more costly resource to use (Wright et al., 2003). For example, all else equal, plants should respond to an increase in soil nitrogen availability by sacrificing less efficient nitrogen use for more efficient water use, a response that would be achieved by maintaining leaf net photosynthesis rates with greater leaf nitrogen allocation and decreased stomatal conductance (Prentice et al., 2014). However, these responses may depend on whole plant nutrient demand to build and maintain structures that support whole plant growth, or a species’ dominant mode of nutrient acquisition.

Whole plant responses to soil nitrogen availability may modify expected leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs expected from photosynthetic least-cost theory. Soil nutrient availability has been shown to exert stronger effects on whole plant growth and total leaf area than leaf photosynthesis, photosynthetic capacity, leaf nitrogen allocation, and water use efficiency (LeBauer & Treseder, 2008; Liang et al., 2020). The stronger whole plant response to soil nutrient availability may be explained through multiple nutrient limitation, which limits net primary productivity globally (Fay et al., 2015; LeBauer & Treseder, 2008; Wieder et al., 2015). In such cases where net primary productivity is limited by soil nutrient availability, or if individuals have high resource requirements for growth (e.g., juvenile individuals or annual species), nutrient demand to build and maintain structures that support whole plant growth may be higher than nutrient demand to build and maintain photosynthetic enzymes in a single leaf, which could minimize leaf acclimation responses to soil nutrient availability as expected from photosynthetic least-cost theory. No studies that investigate patterns expected from photosynthetic least-cost theory have considered whole plant responses to soil nutrient availability in their analyses.

Additionally, leaf and whole plant responses to soil nutrient availability may depend on a species’ dominant mode of nutrient acquisition. Plants acquire nutrients through different nutrient acquisition strategies, such as direct uptake or through symbioses with mycorrhizal fungi and symbiotic nitrogen fixing bacteria (S. E. Smith & Read, 2008). Costs of nutrient use included in photosynthetic least-cost frameworks implicitly include costs of nutrient acquisition, which have been shown to vary in species that have different nutrient acquisition strategies (Brzostek et al., 2014; Perkowski et al., 2021; Terrer et al., 2018), which could influence the cost of using nitrogen relative to water (Bialic‐Murphy et al., 2021; Paillassa et al., 2020). Indeed, one study suggests that disruptions in soil microbial communities due to plant invasion increased the cost of nutrient uptake for native species, which led to trademark nitrogen-water use tradeoffs expected from photosynthetic least-cost theory (Bialic‐Murphy et al., 2021). However, no study to date has investigated these patterns in species capable of associating with symbiotic nitrogen-fixing bacteria, which is important to understand due to the high energetic costs of nitrogen fixation (Gutschick, 1981), the ability of species to rapidly shift from nitrogen fixation to direct uptake when costs of nitrogen fixation are no longer beneficial (Perkowski et al., 2021; Rastetter et al., 2001), and the ability of nitrogen-fixing species to increase nutrient inputs and sustain organic carbon pools in agroecosystems ().

In this study, we grew *Glycine max* L. (Merr.) under two soil nitrogen fertilization treatments and two inoculation treatments in a full factorial greenhouse experiment. We used this experiment to test the following hypotheses:

1. Soil nitrogen fertilization will increase whole plant growth through an increase in total leaf area, which will increase whole plant growth. Inoculation will also increase total leaf area and whole plant growth, but only under the low soil nitrogen treatment. We expect that this would be due to a reduction in nodulation and increase in direct uptake with increasing fertilization.
2. Soil nitrogen fertilization will increase leaf nitrogen per stomatal conductance through an increase in leaf nitrogen allocation and reduction in stomatal conductance. This response will be driven by a reduction in the carbon cost of acquiring nitrogen versus water, causing individuals to sacrifice inefficient nitrogen use for more efficient water use. We expect that inoculation will increase the magnitude of nitrogen-water tradeoffs but will only be observed in the low soil nitrogen treatment due to shifts away from nitrogen fixation with increasing fertilization.
3. Effects of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs will depend on whole plant acclimation responses to soil nitrogen availability. Weak or null whole plant responses to either soil nitrogen fertilization or inoculation will enhance leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs. However, if soil nitrogen fertilization or inoculation elicit strong whole plant growth responses, then we expect either weak or no effect of these treatments on leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs

**Methods**

*Experimental Design*

*Glycine max* seeds were planted in 64 6-liter pots (NS-600, Nursery Supplies, Orange, CA, USA) containing unfertilized potting mix (Sungro Sunshine Mix #2, Agawam, MA, USA). Pots and potting mix were steam sterilized at 95C for 4 hours to eliminate any bacterial or fungal growth. Thirty-two randomly selected pots were planted with seeds inoculated with *Bradyrhizobium japonicum* (Verdesian N-Dure™ Soybean, Cary, NC, USA) following a brief surface sterilization in XX% sodium hypochlorite for XX minutes followed three (?) washes in ultrapure water. The remaining 32 pots were planted with seeds that did not receive any inoculation treatment. Uninoculated seeds were also surface sterilized in XX% sodium hypochlorite for XX minutes followed by three ultrapure water washes to ensure that the only difference between seed treatments was the inoculation treatment.

Upon planting, all pots were immediately placed in one of four random blocks in a greenhouse and received one of two nitrogen fertilization treatments as 150 mL of a modified Hoagland’s solution (Hoagland & Arnon, 1950) equivalent to either 70 or 630 ppm N twice per week for a span of seven weeks. Nitrogen fertilization doses were received as topical agents to the soil surface and were modified to keep concentrations of other macronutrients and micronutrients equivalent (Table S1). Throughout the experiment, plants were routinely well-watered to minimize any chance of water stress. There was no evidence of pot size induced growth limitation at the time of biomass harvest, indicated by marginal mean whole plant biomass: pot volume ratios less than 1 g L-1 within each treatment combination (Table S2; Fig. S1; Poorter et al., 2012).

*Leaf gas exchange and leaf trait measurements*

Six weeks after experiment initiation, we sampled one random, fully expanded leaf with little to no visible external damage for gas exchange measurements. Leaves were attached to a Li-COR LI-6800 (Li-COR Biosciences, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA) portable photosynthesis machine to measure net photosynthesis (*A*net; μmol m-2 s-1), stomatal conductance (*g*s; mmol mol-1), and intercellular CO2 concentration (*C*i; µmol mol-1) at different atmospheric CO2 (*C*a; µmol mol-1) concentrations (i.e., an *A*net/*C*i curve). *A*net/*C*i curves were conducted under saturating light conditions (1,500 μmol m-2 s-1), 50% relative humidity, and with the cuvette temperature set to 25°C. We measured *A*net, *g*s, and *C*i at each of the following reference CO2 concentrations (*C*a; μmol mol-1): 400, 300, 200, 100, 50, 400, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1200, and 1500. Finally, we subjected individuals to at least a 30-minute period of darkness and quantified dark respiration (*R*d; μmol m-2 s-1), again using a Li-COR LI-6800 with relative humidity set to 50% and cuvette temperature set to 25°C, with incoming radiation set to 0 μmol m-2 s-1 and*C*a set to 400 μmol mol-1.

Leaf trait measurements were collected on the same focal leaf used to generate each CO2 response curve. Images of each leaf were curated using a flat-bed scanner to determine wet leaf area using the 'LeafArea' R package (Katabuchi, 2015), which automates leaf area calculations using ImageJ software (Schneider et al., 2012). Each leaf was dried at 65C for at least 48 hours and subsequently weighed and ground until homogenized. Specific leaf area (cm2 g-1) was calculated as the ratio of wet leaf area to dry leaf biomass. Using subsamples of ground and homogenized leaf biomass, we also determined leaf nitrogen content (*N*mass; g g-1) through elemental combustion analysis (Costech-4010, Costech, Inc., Valencia, CA, USA). Leaf nitrogen mass per unit leaf area (*N*area; g m-2) was calculated by dividing *N*mass by specific leaf area, then multiplying by 10,000 to convert cm-2 to m-2.

*Curve fitting and parameter estimation*

We fit *A*net/*C*i curves of each individual using the 'fitaci' function in the 'plantecophys' R package (Duursma, 2015). This function estimates the maximum rate of Rubisco carboxylation (*V*cmax; µmol m-2 s-1) and maximum rate of electron transport for RuBP regeneration (*J*max; µmol m-2 s-1) based on the Farquhar, von Caemmerer, and Berry biochemical model of C3 photosynthesis (Farquhar et al., 1980). We removed all data points that were likely to confer TPU limitation and fit each curve without imposing TPU limitation as a rate-limiting step. We also determined kinetic parameters and CO2 compensation points using leaf temperature and equations derived in Bernacchi et al. (2001) and described in Medlyn et al. (2002). Dark respiration measurements were included in all curve fits. As leaf temperature was different between the dark respiration and *A*net/*C*i curves, we standardized all dark respiration measurements to the temperature of the *A*net/*C*i curves using the log-polynomial approach explained in Heskel *et al.* (2016), where:

(Eqn. 1)

*R*T is the temperature standardized respiration rate, *T* is the temperature in which a given respiration rate is being standardized, and *T*ref is the temperature of the respiration measurement *R*Tref. *b* and *c* are coefficients that Heskel *et al.* (2016) derived from a log-polynomial approach described in O’Sullivan *et al.* (2013) for plant functional types and biomes. We used coefficients set by Heskel *et al.* (2016) for C3 herbaceous species, where *b* was set to 0.1271 and *c* was set to -0.00110. We also set *T*ref to the air temperature of each response curve for all *A*net/*C*i curve fits.

For all *A*net/*C*i curve fits, we manually standardized *V*cmax and *J*max to25C using a modified Arrhenius equation (as in Kattge & Knorr, 2007):

(Eqn. 2)

where *k*25 represents the standardized *V*cmax or *J*max rate at 25C, *k*obs represents the *V*cmax or *J*max estimate at the average leaf temperature measured inside the cuvette during the CO2 response curve. *H*a is the activation energy of *V*cmax (71,513 J mol-1; Kattge & Knorr, 2007) or *J*max (49,884 J mol-1; Kattge & Knorr, 2007). *H*d represents the deactivation energy of both *V*cmax and *J*max (200,000 J mol-1; Medlyn *et al.*, 2002), and R represents the universal gas constant (8.314 J mol-1 K-1). *T*ref represents the standardized temperature of 298.15 K and *T*obs represents the mean leaf temperature (K) during each CO2 response curve. ΔS is an entropy term that Kattge & Knorr (2007) derived as a linear relationship with average growing season temperature (*T*g; °C), where:

(Eqn. 3a)

and:

(Eqn. 3b)

We estimated *T*g in equations 5 and 6 based on mean air temperature for each block throughout the duration of the experiment. Temperature data were collected using HOBO MX2301 data loggers (Onset Computer Corp., Bourne, MA, USA), which recorded temperature and humidity of each block in the greenhouse on a fifteen-minute timestep.

Finally, we used *V*cmax25 and *J*max25 estimates to calculate the ratio of *J*max25 to *V*cmax25 (*J*max25:*V*cmax25; unitless). We also standardized dark respiration to 25C (*R*d25; μmol m-2 s-1) using the same coefficients explained for Eqn. 1, with *T*ref set to 25C, and calculated the ratio of *R*d25 to *V*cmax25 (*R*d25: *V*cmax25; unitless).

*Tradeoffs between nitrogen and water usage*

Photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency (*PNUE*; µmol CO2 g-1 Ns-1) was calculated by dividing *A*net measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 by *N*area. We also estimated intrinsic water-use efficiency (*iWUE*; μmol CO2 mol-1 H2O) by dividing *A*net measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 by *g*s measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2. Tradeoffs between nitrogen and water use were determined by calculating the ratio of *N*area to *g*s measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 (*N*area:*g*s; g N s mol-1 H2O) and *V*cmax to *g*s measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 (*V*cmax:*g*s; μmol CO2 mol-1 H2O). We used the temperature unstandardized *V*cmax value instead of *V*cmax25 for *V*cmax:*g*s because stomatal conductance values were not standardized to 25°C.

*Whole plant traits*

We harvested all experimental individuals and separated biomass of each experimental individual into major organ types (leaves, stems, roots, and root nodules when present) approximately seven weeks after experiment initiation. Leaf areas of all harvested leaves were measured using an LI-3100C (Li-COR Biosciences, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA). Total leaf area (cm2) was calculated as the sum of all leaf areas, including the focal leaf measured during the CO2 response curve. All harvested material was dried in an oven set to 65°C for at least 48 hours, weighed, and ground to homogeneity. Total dry biomass (g) was calculated as the sum of dry leaf, stem, root, and root nodule biomass. We also quantified carbon and nitrogen content of each respective organ type through elemental combustion (Costech-4010, Costech, Inc., Valencia, CA, USA) using subsamples of ground and homogenized organ tissue.

Following the approach explained in Perkowski et al. (2021), we calculated structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen as the ratio of total belowground carbon biomass to whole plant nitrogen biomass (g C g-1 N). Belowground carbon biomass (g C) was calculated by multiplying the carbon content of roots and root nodules by total biomass of each respective organ type, then adding root carbon biomass and root nodule carbon biomass. Whole plant nitrogen biomass (g N) was calculated by multiplying the nitrogen content of leaves, stems, roots, and root nodules by biomass of each respective organ type, then calculating the sum of nitrogen biomass of each organ type. This calculation only quantifies plant structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen and does not include any additional carbon costs of nitrogen acquisition associated with root respiration, root exudation, or root turnover. An explicit explanation of the limitations for interpreting this calculation can be found in Perkowski et al. (2021) and Terrer et al. (2018).

*Statistical analyses*

We built a series of linear mixed-effects models to investigate the impacts of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *G. max* leaf photosynthesis, tradeoffs between nitrogen and water use, and whole plant growth. All models included soil nitrogen fertilization, inoculation, and interactions between soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation as categorical fixed effects. Block number was included as a random intercept term to account for any environmental heterogeneity within the greenhouse room. Models with this independent variable structure were constructed to quantify relationships between soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *N*area, *SLA*, *N*mass, *A*net, *V*cmax25, *J*max25, *J*max25:*V*cmax25, *R*d25, *R*d25:*V*cmax25,total leaf area, whole plant biomass, *g*s, *C*i: *C*a, *PNUE*, *iWUE*, *N*area:*g*s, *V*cmax:*g*s, structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen, belowground carbon biomass, whole plant nitrogen biomass, total biomass, total leaf area, root nodule biomass: root biomass, root nodule biomass, and root biomass.

We used Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality to determine whether linear mixed-effects models satisfied residual normality assumptions. All models satisfied residual normality assumptions except *J*max25:*V*cmax25, *R*d25, *C*i: *C*a, *iWUE*, *PNUE, N*area:*g*s, *V*cmax:*g*s, *N*cost, *C*bg, and total leaf area, root nodule biomass: root biomass, and root nodule biomass (Shapiro-Wilk: p<0.05 in all cases). We first attempted to satisfy residual normality assumptions for these dependent variables using Bonferroni outlier tests to indicate any data points that were statistical outliers. This was done using the ‘OutlierTest’ function in the car R package (Fox & Weisberg, 2019), which uses a Bonferroni-corrected t-distribution approach to evaluate whether residuals of a given data point shift the mean of the sampling population. We removed any data points where Bonferroni: p<0.05, which resulted in one data point being removed from each of *N*area, *R*d25:*V*cmax25, *PNUE*, and *N*area:*g*s, and two data points being removed from each of *J*max25:*V*cmax25, *R*d25, and *C*i: *C*a. The removal of these statistical outliers satisfied residual normality assumptions for *PNUE* and *C*i: *C*a models (Shapiro-Wilk: p>0.05 in both cases).

For any dependent variables where statistical outlier removal did not satisfy residual normality assumptions, we then attempted to satisfy residual normality assumptions by fitting models using dependent variables that were natural-log transformed. If residual normality assumptions were still not met after a natural-log transformation (Shapiro-Wilk: p<0.05), then models were fit using dependent variables that were square root transformed. All residual normality assumptions were met with either a natural log or square root data transformation (Shapiro-Wilk: p>0.05 in all cases). Specifically, we natural log transformed *J*max25:*V*cmax25, *R*d25, *iWUE*, *N*area:*g*s, *V*cmax:*g*s, *N*cost, *C*bg, and total leaf area, and square root transformed root nodule biomass: root biomass and root nodule biomass.

In all statistical models, we used the 'lmer' function in the 'lme4' R package (Bates et al., 2015) to fit each model and the 'Anova' function in the 'car' R package (Fox & Weisberg, 2019) to calculate Type II Wald's χ2 and determine the significance (α=0.05) of each fixed effect coefficient. We then used the 'emmeans' R package (Lenth, 2019) to conduct post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's tests, where degrees of freedom were approximated using the Kenward-Roger approach (Kenward & Roger, 1997). All analyses and plots were conducted in R version 4.2.0 (R Core Team, 2021). All acronyms, acronym descriptions, and units used in this paper are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** Summary of all measured leaf and whole plant traits, their associated units, and a description if trait is referenced as an acronym throughout the paper

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Trait** | **Units** | **Trait description** |
| *A*net | μmol m-2 s-1 | net photosynthesis rate, measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 |
| *C*bg | g C | belowground carbon biomass (numerator of *N*cost) |
| *C*i: *C*a | unitless | intercellular CO2: atmospheric CO2, measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 |
| *g*s | mol m-2 s-1 | stomatal conductance, measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 |
| *iWUE* | μmol CO2 mol-1 H2O | intrinsic water-use efficiency, measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 |
| *J*max25 | μmol m-2 s-1 | maximum RuBP regeneration rate, standardized to 25°C |
| *J*max25: *V*cmax25 | unitless | maximum RuBP regeneration rate: maximum Rubisco carboxylation rate, standardized to 25°C |
| *N*area | g N m-2 | leaf nitrogen per leaf area |
| *N*area:*g*s | g N s mol-1 H2O | leaf nitrogen per stomatal conductance measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 |
| *N*cost | g C g-1 N | structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen |
| *N*mass | g N g-1 biomass | leaf nitrogen content |
| Nodule biomass: root biomass | unitless | - |
| *N*wp | g N | whole plant nitrogen biomass (denominator of *N*cost) |
| *PNUE* | µmol CO2 g-1 N s-1 | photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency, measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 |
| *R*d25 | μmol CO2 m-2 s-1 | dark respiration, measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2 and standardized to 25°C |
| *R*d25: *V*cmax25 | unitless | dark respiration per maximum Rubisco carboxylation rate, standardized to 25°C |
| Root biomass | g | - |
| Root nodule biomass | g | - |
| Specific leaf area | cm2 g-1 | - |
| Total leaf area | cm2 | - |
| *V*cmax:*g*s | μmol CO2 mol-1 H2O | maximum Rubisco carboxylation rate per stomatal conductance |
| *V*cmax25 | μmol CO2 m-2 s-1 | maximum Rubisco carboxylation rate, standardized to 25°C |
| Whole plant biomass | g | - |

**Results**

*Leaf nitrogen allocation*

*N*area and *N*mass were both driven by an interaction between inoculation and nitrogen fertilization (Table 2; Figs. 1A-B). This interaction indicated that inoculated individuals (marginal mean ± SE; *N*area: 0.98 ± 0.04 g m-2; *N*mass: 4.64 ± 0.12 g m-2) had 19.5% and 41.9% higher respective *N*area and *N*mass under low nitrogen fertilization than non-inoculated individuals, (*N*area: 0.82 ± 0.04 g m-2; *N*mass: 3.27 ± 0.12 g m-2;Tukey: p<0.001 in both cases), with no difference between inoculation treatments under high nitrogen fertilization (*N*area Tukey: p=0.623; *N*mass Tukey: p=0.941). Individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (*N*area: 1.17 ± 0.03 g m-2; *N*mass: 5.39±0.09 g m-2) also had 30.0% and 38.2% higher *N*area and *N*mass than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (*N*area: 0.90 ± 0.03 g m-2; *N*mass: 3.9 ± 0.09 g m-2), respectively (Table 2; Figs. 1A-B).

Specific leaf area increased with inoculation and marginally increased with increasing soil nitrogen fertilization, with no observable interaction between fertilization and inoculation (Table 2; Fig. 1C). Specifically, inoculated individuals (578.6 ± 10.9 cm2 g-1) had 6.3% higher specific leaf area than non-inoculated individuals (544.1 ± 10.9 cm2 g-1; Tukey: p=0.014), while individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (572.8 ± 10.9 cm2 g-1) had 4.2% higher specific leaf area than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (549.8 ± 10.9 cm2 g-1; Tukey: p=0.095).

**Table 2** Analysis of variance results exploring effect of nitrogen fertilization, inoculation with *B. japonicum*, and interactions between soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on leaf nitrogen allocation\*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | ***N*area** | | ***N*mass** | | ***SLA*** | |
|  | df | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* |
| N fertilization (N) | 1 | 104.61 | **<0.001** | 139.51 | **<0.001** | 2.88 | *0.090* |
| Inoculation (I) | 1 | 4.45 | **0.035** | 36.38 | **<0.001** | 6.46 | **0.011** |
| N\*I | 1 | 14.62 | **<0.001** | 27.35 | **<0.001** | 1.27 | 0.260 |

\*Significance determined using Type II Wald χ2 tests (α=0.05). *P*-values less than 0.05 are in bold. Key: *N*area=leaf nitrogen per leaf area (g m-2); *N*mass=leaf nitrogen per leaf mass (g g-1); *SLA*=specific leaf area (cm2 g-1)

**Figure 1**

**Chart, box and whisker chart

Description automatically generated**

**Figure 1** Effects of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *G. max* leaf nitrogen per unit leaf area (panel A), leaf nitrogen per unit leaf biomass (panel B), and specific leaf area (panel C). Soil nitrogen fertilization is represented categorically on the x-axis, while inoculation treatment is represented by colored boxplots. Yellow shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were not inoculated with *B. japonicum*, while red shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were inoculated with *B. japonicum*. Boxes are the upper (75% percentile) and lower (25% percentile) quartile. The whiskers are the minimum and maximum value, calculated as 1.5 times the upper and lower quartile value. Grey dots are individual data points, jittered for visibility. The lettering over each box indicates the results from post-hoc Tukey’s tests with different lettering indicating statistically different groups (p<0.05).

*Leaf photosynthesis and gas exchange*

Increasing nitrogen fertilization had a negative effect on *A*net (Table 3; Fig. 2A-B), where individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (9.79 ± 0.46 μmol m-2 s-1) had 20.8% lower *A*net than individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization (*A*net: 12.36 ± 0.46 μmol m-2 s-1; Tukey: p<0.001). There was a marginal negative effect of increasing nitrogen fertilization on *V*cmax25, but no observable fertilization effect on *J*max25 or *J*max25: *V*cmax25 (Table 3; Fig. 2C). There was also no effect of inoculation or any interaction between fertilization and inoculation on *A*net, *V*cmax25, *J*max25: *V*cmax25, but there was a marginal positive effect of inoculation on *J*max25 (Table 3; Fig. 2A-C).

*R*d25 was determined through a weak interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation (Table 3; Fig. 2D). This interaction indicated that inoculated individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (0.81 ± 0.07 μmol m-2 s-1) had 47.2% higher *R*d25 values than inoculated individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization (0.55 ± 0.04 μmol m-2 s-1; Tukey: p=0.004), with no fertilization effect observed in non-inoculated individuals (Tukey: p=0.956).

Increasing nitrogen fertilization generally had an XX effect on *R*d25: *V*cmax25 (Table 3). Specifically, individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization (0.0178 ± 0.0015) had XX% higher *R*d25: *V*cmax25 than those grown under high nitrogen fertilization (0.0125 ± 0.0011; Tukey: p=0.005). There was no effect of inoculation or interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *R*d25: *V*cmax25 (Table 3).

Increasing nitrogen fertilization generally decreased *g*s, but did not change *C*i: *C*a (Table 3). Specifically, individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (0.135 ± 0.009 mol m-2 s-1) had 25.0% lower *g*s than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (0.180 ± 0.010 mol m-2 s-1), respectively (Tukey: p=0.002). There was no effect of inoculation or any observable interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on either response variable (Table 3).

**Table 3** Analysis of variance results exploring effect of soil nitrogen fertilization, inoculation with *B. japonicum*, and interactions between soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on leaf photosynthesis and gas exchange\*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | ***A*net** | | ***V*cmax25** | | ***J*max25** | | ***J*max25:*V*cmax25** | | ***R*d25** | |
|  | df | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* |
| N fertilization (N) | 1 | 15.82 | **<0.001** | 2.87 | **0.090** | 2.38 | 0.123 | 0.77 | 0.381 | 8.61 | **0.003** |
| Inoculation (I) | 1 | 0.46 | 0.498 | 1.50 | 0.221 | 2.86 | *0.091* | 2.20 | 0.138 | 1.51 | 0.219 |
| N\*I | 1 | 0.39 | 0.533 | 0.18 | 0.668 | 0.45 | 0.502 | 0.97 | 0.607 | 4.34 | **0.037** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | ***R*d25:*V*cmax25** | | ***g*s** | | ***C*i: *C*a** | |  | |  | |
|  | df | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* |  |  |  |  |
| N fertilization (N) | 1 | 10.54 | **0.001** | 9.97 | **0.002** | 0.01 | 0.913 |  |  |  |  |
| Inoculation (I) | 1 | 0.65 | 0.421 | 0.34 | 0.561 | 0.28 | 0.597 |  |  |  |  |
| N\*I | 1 | 3.06 | *0.080* | 0.01 | 0.929 | 1.40 | 0.237 |  |  |  |  |

\*Significance determined using Type II Wald χ2 tests (α=0.05). *P*-values less than 0.05 are in bold and *P*-values between 0.05 and 0.1 are italicized. Key: *A*net=light saturated net photosynthesis measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2; *V*cmax25=maximum rate of Rubisco carboxylation standardized to 25°C; *J*max25=maximum rate of electron transport for RuBP regeneration standardized to 25°C, *J*max25:*V*cmax25=the ratio of *J*max25 to *V*cmax25, both standardized to 25°C; *R*d25=dark respiration rate standardized to 25°C; *R*d25:*V*cmax25= ratio of *R*d25 to *V*cmax25, both standardized to 25°C; *g*s=stomatal conductance measured at 400 μmol mol-1 CO2; *C*i:*C*a=ratio of intercellular CO2 to atmospheric CO2.

**Figure 2**

**Chart, box and whisker chart

Description automatically generated**

**Figure 2** Effects of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *G. max* net photosynthesis (panel A), dark respiration standardized to 25C (panel B), maximum Rubisco carboxylation rate standardized to 25C (panel C), and the maximum electron transport for RuBP regeneration rate standardized to 25C (panel D). Soil nitrogen fertilization is represented categorically on the x-axis, while inoculation treatment is represented by colored boxplots. Yellow shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were not inoculated with *B. japonicum*, while red shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were inoculated with *B. japonicum*. Boxes are the upper (75% percentile) and lower (25% percentile) quartile. The whiskers are the minimum and maximum value, calculated as 1.5 times the upper and lower quartile value. Grey dots are individual data points, jittered for visibility. The lettering over each box indicates the results from post-hoc Tukey’s tests with different lettering indicating statistically different groups (p<0.05).

*Tradeoffs between nitrogen and water usage*

*PNUE* was determined through an interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation (Table 4; Fig. 3A). This interaction indicated that inoculated individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization (12.60 ± 0.62 μmol CO2 g-1 N s-1) had 17.3% lower *PNUE* than non-inoculated individuals also grown under low nitrogen fertilization (15.23 ± 0.64 μmol CO2 g-1 N s-1; Tukey: p=0.024), with no difference in inoculation treatments under high nitrogen fertilization (Tukey: p=0.799). We also observed a strong negative effect of soil nitrogen fertilization on *PNUE*, where individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (8.34 ± 0.45 μmol CO2 g-1 N s-1) had 40.1% lower *PNUE* than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (13.92 ± 0.45 μmol CO2 g-1 N s-1; Tukey: p<0.001). There was no individual inoculation effect on *PNUE* (Table 4; Fig. 3A).

There was no effect of nitrogen fertilization, inoculation, or any observable interaction between fertilization and inoculation on *iWUE* (Table 4; Fig. 3B).

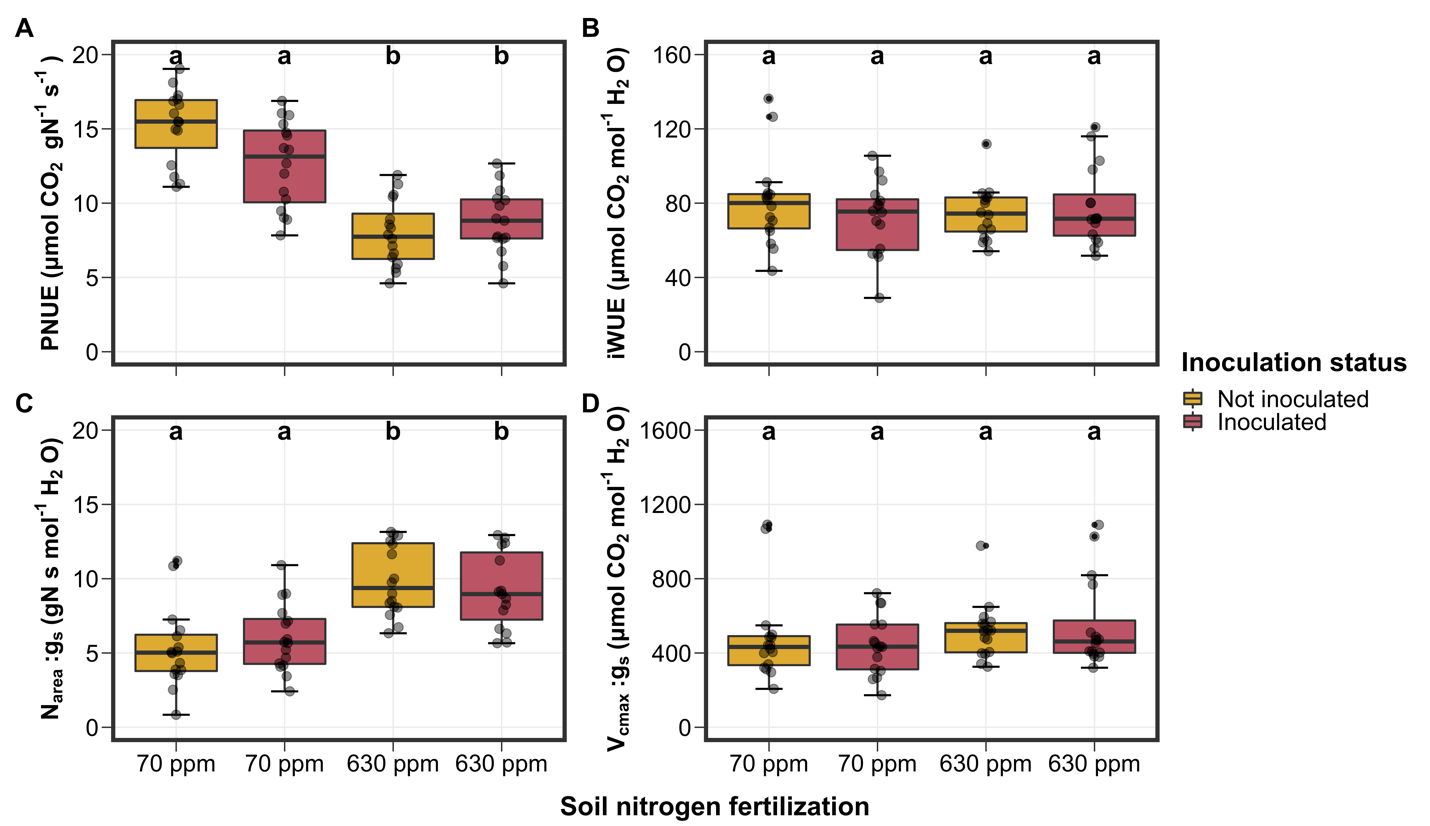
Increasing nitrogen fertilization generally increased *N*area: *g*s (Table 4; Fig 3C) and marginally increased *V*cmax: *g*s (Table 4; Fig 3D). Individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (9.54 ± 0.45 g N s mol-1 H2O) had 68.3% higher *N*area: *g*s than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (5.67 ± 0.0.44 g N s mol-1 H2O; Tukey: p<0.001). There was no observable inoculation effect or interaction between fertilization and inoculation on *N*area: *g*s and *V*cmax: *g*s (Table 4).

**Table 4** Analysis of variance results exploring effect of soil nitrogen fertilization, inoculation with *B. japonicum*, and interactions between soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on tradeoffs between nitrogen and water usage\*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | ***PNUE*** | | ***iWUE*** | | ***N*area:*g*s** | | ***V*cmax:*g*s** | |
|  | df | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* |
| N fertilization (N) | 1 | 77.73 | **<0.001** | <0.01 | **0.974** | 38.07 | **<0.001** | 3.46 | *0.063* |
| Inoculation (I) | 1 | 2.06 | 0.152 | 0.30 | 0.586 | <0.01 | 0.967 | 0.06 | 0.811 |
| N\*I | 1 | 7.42 | **0.006** | 1.36 | 0.243 | 1.20 | 0.274 | 0.25 | 0.619 |

\*Significance determined using Type II Wald χ2 tests (α=0.05). *P*-values less than 0.05 are in bold and *P*-values between 0.05 and 0.1 are italicized. Key: *PNUE*=photosynthetic nitrogen use efficiency; *N*area: *g*s=ratio of *N*area to *g*s; *V*cmax: *g*s=ratio of temperature unstandardized *V*cmax to *g*s.

**Figure 3**

****

**Figure 3** Effects of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *G. max* photosynthetic nitrogen use efficiency (panel A), intrinsic water-use efficiency (panel B), the ratio of leaf nitrogen per leaf area to stomatal conductance (panel C), and the ratio of the maximum Rubisco carboxylation rate to stomatal conductance (panel D). Soil nitrogen fertilization is represented categorically on the x-axis, while inoculation treatment is represented by colored boxplots. Yellow shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were not inoculated with *B. japonicum*, while red shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were inoculated with *B. japonicum*. Boxes are the upper (75% percentile) and lower (25% percentile) quartile. The whiskers are the minimum and maximum value, calculated as 1.5 times the upper and lower quartile value. Grey dots are individual data points, jittered for visibility. The lettering over each box indicates the results from post-hoc Tukey’s tests with different lettering indicating statistically different groups (p<0.05).

*Structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen*

Structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen were driven by a strong interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation (Table 5; Fig. 4A). This interaction indicated that inoculated individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization (2.77 ± 0.44 g C g-1 N) had 63.4% lower structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen than non-inoculated individuals also grown under low nitrogen fertilization (7.56 ± 1.20 g C g-1 N; Tukey: p<0.001), with no difference between inoculation treatments under high nitrogen fertilization (Tukey: p=0.597). Nitrogen fertilization also decreased structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen, where individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (2.10 ± 0.25 g C g-1 N) had 54.1% lower structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (4.58 ± 0.52 g C g-1 N; Tukey: p<0.001). Inoculation decreased structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen, where inoculated individuals (2.24 ± 0.26 g C g-1 N) had 91.5% lower structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen than non-inoculated individuals (4.29 ± 0.49 g C g-1 N; Tukey: p<0.001).

Belowground carbon biomass (numerator of carbon cost to acquire nitrogen calculation) was driven by a weak inoculation effect that indicated a negative effect of inoculation (Table 5; Fig. 4B). Specifically, inoculated individuals (0.295 ± 0.037 g C) had 29.9% less belowground carbon biomass than non-inoculated individuals (0.421 ± 0.053 g C; Tukey: p=0.050). There was no effect of nitrogen fertilization or interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation (Table 5).

Whole plant nitrogen biomass (denominator of carbon cost to acquire nitrogen calculation), on the other hand, was driven by a strong interaction between fertilization and inoculation (Table 5; Fig. 5C). This interaction indicated that inoculated individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization (0.100 ± 0.005 g N) had 72.4% higher whole plant nitrogen biomass than non-inoculated individuals also grown under low nitrogen fertilization (0.058 ± 0.005 g N; Tukey: p<0.001), with no difference between inoculation treatments under high nitrogen fertilization (Tukey: p=0.873). Nitrogen fertilization also increased whole plant nitrogen biomass, where individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (0.173 ± 0.004 gN) had 119.0% higher whole plant nitrogen biomass than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (0.079 ± 0.003 gN; Tukey: p<0.001). Inoculation increased whole plant nitrogen biomass, where inoculated individuals (0.138 ± 0.004 gN) had 17.4% higher whole plant nitrogen biomass than non-inoculated individuals (0.114 ± 0.004 gN; Tukey: p<0.001).

**Table 5** Analysis of variance results exploring effect of soil nitrogen fertilization, inoculation with *B. japonicum*, and interactions between soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen, whole plant growth, and root nodulation\*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | **Carbon cost to acquire nitrogen** | | **Belowground carbon biomass** | | **Whole plant nitrogen biomass** | | **Total**  **leaf area** | | **Whole plant biomass** | |
|  | df | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* |
| N fertilization (N) | 1 | 23.34 | **<0.001** | 0.08 | 0.782 | 358.69 | **<0.001** | 292.46 | **<0.001** | 52.43 | **<0.001** |
| Inoculation (I) | 1 | 16.75 | **<0.001** | 4.17 | **0.041** | 24.11 | **<0.001** | 35.09 | **<0.001** | 2.04 | 0.153 |
| N\*I | 1 | 4.83 | **0.028** | 0.265 | 0.607 | 13.52 | **<0.001** | 17.90 | **<0.001** | 1.23 | 0.267 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Nodule biomass: root biomass** | | **Nodule**  **biomass** | | **Root**  **biomass** | |  | |  | |
|  | df | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* | χ2 | *p* |  |  |  |  |
| N fertilization (N) | 1 | 0.99 | 0.320 | 1.36 | 0.243 | 0.01 | 0.918 |  |  |  |  |
| Inoculation (I) | 1 | 31.13 | **<0.001** | 30.79 | **<0.001** | 3.27 | *0.071* |  |  |  |  |
| N\*I | 1 | 0.76 | 0.383 | 1.01 | 0.316 | 0.25 | 0.614 |  |  |  |  |

\*Significance determined using Type II Wald χ2 tests (α=0.05). *P*-values less than 0.05 are in bold and *P*-values between 0.05 and 0.1 are italicized.

**Figure 4**

**Chart, box and whisker chart

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**Figure 4** Effects of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *G. max* structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen (“*N*cost”; panel A), belowground carbon biomass (“*C*bg”; panel B), and whole plant nitrogen biomass (“*N*wp”; panel C). Soil nitrogen fertilization is represented categorically on the x-axis, while inoculation treatment is represented by colored boxplots. Yellow shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were not inoculated with *B. japonicum*, while red shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were inoculated with *B. japonicum*. Boxes are the upper (75% percentile) and lower (25% percentile) quartile. The whiskers are the minimum and maximum value, calculated as 1.5 times the upper and lower quartile value. Grey dots are individual data points, jittered for visibility. The lettering over each box indicates the results from post-hoc Tukey’s tests with different lettering indicating statistically different groups (p<0.05).

*Whole plant processes*

Total leaf area was driven by a strong interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation (Table 5; Fig. 5A). This interaction indicated that inoculated individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization (829.2 ± 30.5 cm2) had 59.7% higher total leaf area than non-inoculated individuals also grown under low nitrogen fertilization (519.2 ± 30.5 cm2; Tukey: p<0.001), with no difference between inoculation treatments under high nitrogen fertilization (Tukey: p=0.631). Nitrogen fertilization also increased total leaf area, where individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (1196.3 ± 21.6 cm2) had 77.4% higher total leaf area than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (674.2 ± 21.6 cm2; Tukey: p<0.001). Inoculation also increased total leaf area, where inoculated individuals (1025.7 ± 21.6 cm2) had 21.4 higher total leaf area than non-inoculated individuals (844.8 ± 21.6 g C g-1 N; Tukey: p<0.001).

Whole plant biomass was driven by nitrogen fertilization (Table 5; Fig. 5B), where individuals grown under high nitrogen fertilization (5.24 ± 0.23 g) had 55.5% higher whole plant biomass than those grown under low nitrogen fertilization (3.37 ± 0.14 g; Tukey: p<0.001). There was no observable inoculation effect nor was there any interaction between inoculation and nitrogen fertilization (Table 5; Fig. 5B).

**Figure 5**

**Chart, box and whisker chart

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**Figure 5** Effects of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on *G. max* total leaf area (panel A) and whole plant biomass (panel B). Soil nitrogen fertilization is represented categorically on the x-axis, while inoculation treatment is represented by colored boxplots. Yellow shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were not inoculated with *B. japonicum*, while red shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were inoculated with *B. japonicum*. Boxes are the upper (75% percentile) and lower (25% percentile) quartile. The whiskers are the minimum and maximum value, calculated as 1.5 times the upper and lower quartile value. Grey dots are individual data points, jittered for visibility. The lettering over each box indicates the results from post-hoc Tukey’s tests with different lettering indicating statistically different groups (p<0.05).

*Plant investment in nitrogen fixation*

Root nodule biomass: root biomass and root nodule biomass were driven by a positive inoculation effect (Table 5; Figs. 6A-B). Specifically, inoculated individuals (root nodule biomass: root biomass: 0.144 ± 0.023 g; root nodule biomass: 0.0148 ± 0.0043 g) had 323.5% and 2366.7% greater root nodule biomass: root biomass and root nodule biomass than non-inoculated individuals (root nodule biomass: root biomass: 0.034 ± 0.023 g; root nodule biomass: 0.0006 ± 0.0009 g), respectively (Tukey: p<0.001 in both cases). There was also a marginal negative effect of inoculation on root biomass, which indicated that inoculated individuals (0.671 ± 0.084 g) had 26.9% lower root biomass than non-inoculated individuals (0.918±0.114 g; Tukey: p=0.081). There was no observable effect of nitrogen fertilization or interaction between nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on root nodule biomass: root biomass, root nodule biomass, or root biomass (Table 5).

**Figure 6**

**Chart, box and whisker chart

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**Figure 6** Effects of soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation on the root nodule biomass: root biomass ratio (panel A), root nodule biomass (panel B), and root biomass (panel C). Soil nitrogen fertilization is represented categorically on the x-axis, while inoculation treatment is represented by colored boxplots. Yellow shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were not inoculated with *B. japonicum*, while red shaded boxplots indicate individuals that were inoculated with *B. japonicum*. Boxes are the upper (75% percentile) and lower (25% percentile) quartile. The whiskers are the minimum and maximum value, calculated as 1.5 times the upper and lower quartile value. Grey dots are individual data points, jittered for visibility. The lettering over each box indicates the results from post-hoc Tukey’s tests with different lettering indicating statistically different groups (P<0.05).

**Discussion**

Photosynthetic least-cost theory suggests that plants can acclimate to growing conditions by minimizing the summed costs of nitrogen and water use (Prentice et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2003). All else equal, the theory predicts that an increase in soil nitrogen availability should increase in water use efficiency and decrease in nitrogen use efficiency through an increase in leaf nitrogen allocation per stomatal conductance (Paillassa et al., 2020). However, the cost of nutrient use, and therefore the magnitude of nitrogen-water use tradeoffs, might vary in species different nutrient acquisition strategies due to differential costs of nutrient acquisition (Brzostek et al., 2014; Perkowski et al., 2021; Terrer et al., 2018) and may depend on whole plant nutrient demand to build and maintain structures that support whole plant growth (LeBauer & Treseder, 2008; Liang et al., 2020). In this experiment, we grew *G. max* under two soil nitrogen fertilization treatments and two inoculation treatments levels in a full factorial greenhouse experiment to better understand how acquisition strategy and whole plant nutrient demand might modify expected photosynthetic least-cost patterns.

Our results support water-nitrogen use tradeoffs expected from photosynthetic least-cost theory in response to soil nitrogen availability. Specifically, we observed a slight stimulation in leaf nitrogen allocation and reduction in stomatal conductance with increasing nitrogen fertilization, which corresponded with a reduction in photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency and stimulation in intrinsic water-use efficiency. However, except for a stimulation in leaf nitrogen allocation and leaf nitrogen content for inoculated individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization, there was no effect of inoculation with *B. japonicum* on leaf traits commonly associated with nitrogen-water use tradeoffs.

While we did find support for nitrogen-water use tradeoffs one might expect in response to increasing soil nitrogen fertilization, we also observed a strong whole plant growth response to soil nitrogen fertilization. Specifically, increasing soil nitrogen fertilization led to an XX% stimulation in total leaf area and XX% stimulation in whole plant biomass when averaged across inoculation treatments, compared to an XX% reduction in leaf photosynthesis and XX% stimulation in leaf nitrogen allocation.

These results suggest that the weak nitrogen-water use tradeoffs explained in the previous paragraph may have been facilitated by an XX% reduction in the carbon cost of nitrogen acquisition

However, these tradeoffs corresponded with strong total leaf area and whole plant biomass responses to soil nitrogen fertilization, and there was no effect of inoculation with *B. japonicum*

and a strong stimulation in total leaf area in inoculated individuals grown under low nitrogen fertilization, suggesting a possible tradeoff between leaf demand to build and maintain photosynthetic machinery and whole platn demand to build and maintain structures that support whole plant growth. Our results suggest that symbioses with nitrogen-fixing bacteria did not modify nitrogen-water use tradeoffs

Photosynthetic least-cost theory suggests that plants can acclimate to growing conditions by minimizing the summed costs of nitrogen and water use (Prentice et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2003). All else equal, the theory predicts that an increase in soil nitrogen availability should increase in water use efficiency and decrease in nitrogen use efficiency through an increase in leaf nitrogen allocation per stomatal conductance (Paillassa et al., 2020). However, the cost of nutrient use, and therefore the magnitude of nitrogen-water use tradeoffs, might vary in species different nutrient acquisition strategies due to differential costs of nutrient acquisition (Brzostek et al., 2014; Perkowski et al., 2021; Terrer et al., 2018) and may depend on whole plant nutrient demand to build and maintain structures that support whole plant growth (LeBauer & Treseder, 2008; Liang et al., 2020). In this experiment, we grew *G. max* under two soil nitrogen fertilization treatments and two inoculation treatments levels in a full factorial greenhouse experiment to better understand how acquisition strategy and whole plant nutrient demand might modify expected photosynthetic least-cost patterns.

Soil nitrogen fertilization had a strong positive effect on total leaf area and whole plant growth. These patterns corresponded with a reduction in leaf photosynthesis and biochemical process rates and an increase in leaf nitrogen allocation, which led to a reduction in photosynthetic nitrogen use efficiency and increase in water use efficiency. Together, these results suggest stronger whole plant response than leaf acclimation response to soil nitrogen fertilization, supporting our third hypothesis that the strength of leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs might depend on whole plant nutrient demand. Notably, *G. max* are fast growing species with high resource requirements for growth and reproduction, so it is likely that whole plant demand to build and maintain structures that support whole plant growth may have outweighed leaf demand to maintain tradeoffs between nitrogen and water usage.

Interestingly, there was no effect of inoculation on leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs despite an apparent stimulation in leaf nitrogen allocation and leaf nitrogen content in inoculated individuals grown under the low nitrogen fertilization treatment. However, there was a strong inoculation effect on total leaf area and structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen, suggesting that inoculation had a larger contribution to satisfying whole plant nutrient demand than leaf nutrient demand to build and maintain photosynthetic machinery.

*Soil nitrogen fertilization and inoculation modifies tradeoffs between nitrogen and water use*

Photosynthetic least-cost theory predicts that plants should respond to increased nutrient availability by increasing leaf nitrogen allocation and decreasing stomatal conductance, leading to a reduction in photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency and stimulation in water-use efficiency (Prentice et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2003). Our results support these outcomes, indicating a slight stimulation in leaf nitrogen allocation and reduction in stomatal conductance that corresponded with a reduction in photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency and stimulation in intrinsic water-use efficiency.

Interestingly, inoculation had limited effects on leaf water-nitrogen use tradeoffs. While a stimulation in leaf nitrogen allocation led to a reduction in photosynthetic nitrogen use efficiency for inoculated individuals growing under low soil nitrogen, there was no individual or interactive effect of inoculation on stomatal conductance or intrinsic water use efficiency. Additionally, there was no observable effect of inoculation on leaf nitrogen per stomatal conductance or *V*cmax per stomatal conductance. These patterns suggest that inoculation does not necessarily modify leaf nitrogen-water use tradeoffs, although could allow individuals to hedge bets against dry growing conditions. These results also indicate that a reduction in photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency may be driven by a lack of nutrient limitation, as nitrogen is less limited in the environment through nitrogen fixation than more finite pools of nitrogen in the soil.

*Integrating leaf and whole plant processes into a single framework*

The land surface component of Earth system models commonly predict photosynthesis based on empirically observed relationships between soil nitrogen availability, leaf nitrogen allocation, and photosynthetic capacity (Rogers, 2014; Rogers et al., 2017). However, recent work suggests that leaf nitrogen allocation (Dong et al., 2017, 2020) and photosynthetic capacity (Peng et al., 2021; N. G. Smith et al., 2019) can each be predicted independent of soil nitrogen availability, indicating a possible decoupling of these relationships that require further inquiry. Our results show that soil nitrogen fertilization increased leaf nitrogen allocation, a pattern that did not coincide with an increase in leaf photosynthesis or photosynthetic capacity. Instead, soil nitrogen fertilization increased total leaf area, which effectively increased whole plant photosynthesis through a greater area of total light interception and stomata per plant.

*Study limitations*

This study does have a few limitations that deserve recognition and limit the generality of our observed responses. First, effects of soil nitrogen fertilization on root nodulation may be nonlinear, as inferred from root nodulation data in Perkowski et al. (2021), and a two-point fertilization experiment such as the one done here is not equipped to address any of the possible nonlinearities that might explain the interaction between soil nitrogen fertilization and root nodulation. Future work should consider conducting similar experiments using a larger suite of nitrogen fertilization treatments than what is presented here. Additionally, this study used a single species and a single inoculation species. While this did allow us to isolate mechanisms that drive leaf water-nitrogen responses to soil nutrients and inoculation independent of phylogeny or genetic diversity, future work should consider conducting similar experiments using a suite of leguminous species, as well as a suite of different *Rhizobium* cocktails. Doing so would better allow us to generalize patterns observed here, and better replicate soil microbial communities observed in nature.

*Conclusions*

In summary, increasing soil nitrogen fertilization increased leaf nitrogen allocation per stomatal conductance through an increase in leaf nitrogen allocation with no change in stomatal conductance. These patterns corresponded with a decrease in photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency and increase in intrinsic water-use efficiency with increasing fertilization. Interestingly, these nitrogen-water use tradeoffs occurred alongside an increase in total leaf area and whole plant biomass, indicating no apparent tradeoff between leaf and whole plant allocation decisions. The stimulation in leaf nitrogen allocation per stomatal conductance occurred alongside a reduction in structural carbon costs to acquire nitrogen, which could infer that these tradeoffs were driven by a reduction in the cost of acquiring nitrogen relative to water. Inoculation with *B. japonicum* only increased leaf nitrogen allocation and decreased photosynthetic nitrogen-use efficiency under low soil nitrogen, which supports the common observation that advantages of nitrogen fixation may only be apparent under low soil nutrient environments due to high energetic costs of nitrogen fixation. Despite this, there was no inoculation effect on leaf nitrogen per stomatal conductance under low fertilization. These results deserve to be investigated again using a larger suite of soil fertilization treatments and more than a single species or inoculation type to determine whether these patterns are generalizable across species capable of forming associations with symbiotic nitrogen-fixing bacteria.

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**Author contributions**

EAP coordinated all leaf physiological measurements, conducted data analysis, wrote the first draft of the manuscript, and made revisions based on collaborator and reviewer feedback. JT designed the experiment, carried out the experiment, and contributed to manuscript revisions. HG assisted with post-experiment harvest and contributed to manuscript revisions. NGS oversaw experiment progress, assisted with the post-experiment harvest, and contributed to manuscript revisions. All authors supported publication of this manuscript to XX.

**Data Availability Statement**

All statistical analyses and plots were created in R version 4.2.0. All R code and data for this manuscript are available in a GitHub repository at <insert URL here> (<insert DOI from Zenodo here>).

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