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Yuan An  
*Shanghai Jiaotong University, China*

Jianfeng Li  
*Gansu Agricultural University, China*

Jixiong Sun  
*Gansu Agricultural University, China*

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## Effects of soil pH and Fe<sup>2+</sup> content on growth and physiology of alfalfa

Yuan An<sup>1</sup> Jianfeng Li<sup>2</sup> Jixiong Sun<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of agronomy and biology, Shanghai JiaoTong university, Shanghai, China. E-mail: anyuan@sjtu.edu.cn; <sup>2</sup>College of Pratacult ural Science, Gansu Agricult ural Univer sity, Lanzhou, China

**Key words :** soil pH , iron toxicity , Fe<sup>2+</sup> content , alfalfa

**Introduction** Soils in the wet tropics contain high levels of iron that are toxic to alfalfa plants . The soils affected by iron toxicity are characterized by high iron concentration in the soil solution and low pH (Pathirana , 2002) . High concentration of water-soluble Fe<sup>2+</sup> results in growth retardation or even death of alfalfa plants . In addition to high levels of iron , these soils also have a low pH which leads to damages of root growth and rhizobium development , as well as deficiencies of other nutrients such as P and Ca , which results in severe yield losses .

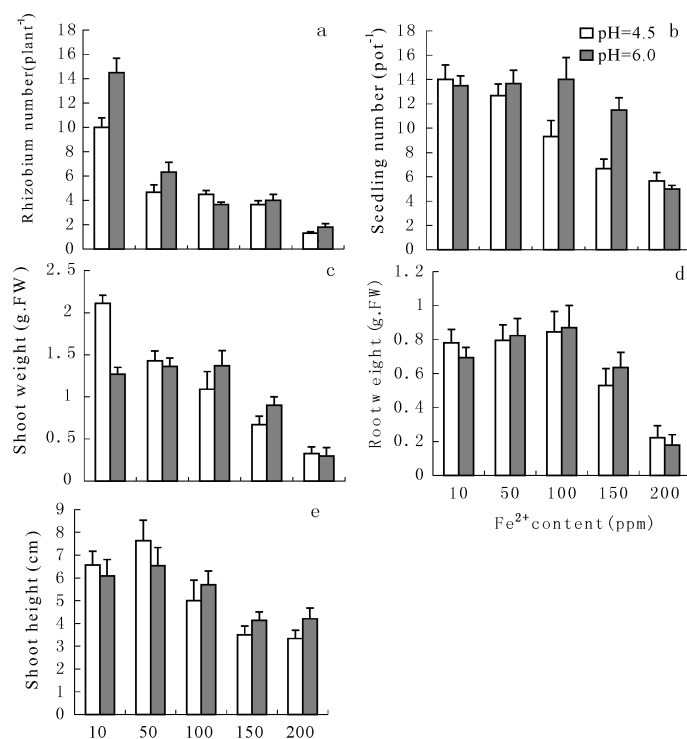
**Materials and methods** Seeds of WL525 were sown in 40 plastic pots with the size of 20 cm-diameter and 20 cm-height for each pot . The medium for seedling in the pots were the mixture of sand and FeSO<sub>4</sub> . The contents of FeSO<sub>4</sub> in the mediums were five levels , which were 10mg/kg , 50mg/kg , 100mg/kg , 150mg/kg and 200mg/kg . Each FeSO<sub>4</sub> level had eight pots . The pH of the mediums were adjusted to two levels of pH4 .5 and pH6 .0 by the way of placing each pot into plates containing modified 1/4Hogland nutrient with pH=4 .5 and pH=6 .0 until the Hogland nutrient over 3~5mm of soil surface in each pot . The adjusted pH work did one time every week . Each treatment has four repeats .

**Results** The rhizobium number , seedling number , shoot weight , root weight and shoot height were higher in pH6 .0 than pH4 .5 under the treatments of Fe<sup>2+</sup> contents between 100 mg/kg and 150 mg/kg after 40d growth . But they were lower in pH6 .0 than pH4 .5 among Fe<sup>2+</sup> treatments of 10 mg/kg , 50 mg/kg and 200 mg/kg , except for rhizobium number . With the increase of Fe<sup>2+</sup> content in medium , the rhizobium number , seedling number , and shoot weight significantly decreased ( p < 0 .05 ) in pH4 .5 , but the root weight and shoot height increased to highest value at Fe<sup>2+</sup> content of 100 mg/kg and 50 mg/kg , respectively . There were no significantly difference ( p > 0 .05 ) about seedling number , shoot weight and shoot height among the Fe<sup>2+</sup> contents of 10 mg/kg to 100 mg/kg in pH6 .0 , but were significantly higher ( p > 0 .05 ) than 150 mg/kg and 200 mg/kg . The rhizobium number significantly decreased ( p > 0 .05 ) with the increase of Fe<sup>2+</sup> contents in pH6 .0 , while shoot weight significantly increased ( p > 0 .05 ) to highest value until Fe<sup>2+</sup> content of 100 mg/kg , then significantly decreased ( p > 0 .05 ) .

**Conclusions** When the Fe<sup>2+</sup> content of soil were less than 50 mg/kg , the growth of alfalfa did not restricted by Fe<sup>2+</sup> and lower pH , but the growth of alfalfa were significantly restricted when the Fe<sup>2+</sup> content was over 100 mg/kg in pH4 .5 , and over 150 mg/kg in pH6 .0 . The significantly decreased rhizobium number in pH4 .5 may contribute to the yield losses of alfalfa in lower pH of native soil .

### Reference

Pathirana , R . , Wijithawarna , W . A . , Jagoda , K . & Ranawaka , A . L . , (2002) . Selection of rice for iron toxicity tolerance through irradiated caryopsis culture . *Plant Cell , Tissue and Organ Culture* , 70 , 83-90 .



**Figure 1** Changes of rhizobium number , seedling number , shoot weight , root weight and shoot height on different pH and Fe<sup>2+</sup> contents .