International Journal of Horticulture, Agriculture and Food Science (IJHAF)
ISSN: 2456-8635
[Vol-9, Issue-1, Jan-Mar, 2025]
Issue DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijhaf.9.1
Peer-Reviewed Journal

Environmental Factors Influencing Microfungal Colonization and Decomposition of Agricultural Waste

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Received: 22 Feb 2025; Received in revised form: 20 Mar 2025; Accepted: 26 Mar 2025; Available online: 30 Mar 2025

Abstract*— *Microfungi are essential decomposers of agricultural waste, facilitating nutrient recycling and soil fertility improvement. Various environmental factors, including temperature, moisture, pH, and oxygen availability, significantly influence the rate and efficiency of fungal colonization and decomposition. This study examines the impact of these environmental variables on microfungal succession in decomposing Brassica campestris L. leaf litter over 180 days. Using a litterbag experiment, fungal diversity was assessed under different temperature ranges (15°C, 25°C, and 35°C), moisture levels (30%, 60%, and 90%), pH conditions (acidic, neutral, and alkaline), and oxygen availability (aerobic vs. anaerobic). The results indicate that* ***optimal decomposition occurred at 25°C, 60% moisture, and neutral pH*, with accelerated fungal activity under aerobic conditions. Early colonizers such as Aspergillus and Penicillium thrived in warm, moist conditions, whereas ligninolytic fungi like Alternaria and Curvularia dominated in later stages under aerobic conditions. The study highlights the importance of environmental factors in determining fungal succession and decomposition efficiency. These findings can guide sustainable waste management practices for improved soil health.*

***Keywords*— *Microfungi, agricultural waste, fungal colonization, decomposition, environmental factors*.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The decomposition of agricultural waste is a crucial natural process that converts organic residues into humus, improving soil fertility and ecosystem stability. Among microbial decomposers, **microfungi play a critical role in breaking down cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin**, accelerating organic matter recycling. However, the efficiency of fungal colonization and decomposition is heavily influenced by environmental factors such as **temperature, moisture, pH, and oxygen levels**.

Understanding how these variables impact fungal activity can help optimize agricultural waste decomposition, enhance composting strategies, and improve overall soil health. This study investigates the role of environmental factors in fungal colonization and organic matter breakdown in *Brassica campestris* L. leaf litter, a common agricultural residue.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of environmental conditions on microbial decomposition has been extensively studied (Webster, 1970; Hudson, 1962). Research has shown that:

- **Temperature:** Moderate temperatures (25°C–30°C) enhance fungal growth, whereas extreme temperatures reduce enzymatic activity (Swift et al., 1979).

- **Moisture:** Decomposition is highest at 50–70% moisture levels; drought conditions slow microbial activity, while excessive moisture limits oxygen availability (Pugh, 1964).
- **pH:** Most fungi thrive in slightly acidic to neutral pH (4.5–7), but certain species like *Curvularia* and *Trichoderma* can tolerate alkaline conditions (Blanchette, 2000).
- **Oxygen:** Aerobic fungi dominate decomposition, whereas anaerobic conditions favor bacterial activity, leading to slower organic matter breakdown (Deacon, 1997).

Although these general microbial principles are well documented, **limited studies have explored their specific effects on microfungal colonization in agricultural waste decomposition**. This research aims to fill that gap by focusing on *Brassica* leaf litter decomposition under different environmental conditions.

Problem Definition

While agricultural waste is a valuable organic resource, improper decomposition can lead to **soil degradation, nutrient imbalance, and increased waste accumulation**. Identifying the environmental conditions that optimize fungal colonization and decomposition can:

- Improve **soil fertility through enhanced organic matter breakdown**.
- Develop **efficient composting techniques** to manage agricultural waste.
- Optimize the use of **fungal decomposers for sustainable agriculture**.

This study focuses on how **temperature, moisture, pH, and oxygen levels** influence fungal succession and decomposition efficiency in *Brassica campestris* L. leaf litter.

III. METHODOLOGY

1 Sample Collection and Experimental Setup

Freshly fallen *Brassica campestris* L. leaf litter was collected, air-dried, and placed into **nylon mesh litterbags (12” × 12”)**. The bags were buried **6 inches below the soil surface** under controlled experimental conditions.

Variables Tested:

- **Temperature:** 15°C (low), 25°C (moderate), and 35°C (high).
- **Moisture Levels:** 30% (low), 60% (optimal), and 90% (excessive).
- **pH Conditions:** Acidic (4), neutral (7), and alkaline (9).
- **Oxygen Availability:** Aerobic vs. anaerobic decomposition.

Litter samples were retrieved at **10, 30, 60, 90, 120, 150, and 180 days** for fungal and biochemical analysis.

2 Fungal Isolation and Identification

Fungal species were isolated using **serial dilution, damp chamber, and culture plate techniques** on Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA). Identification was conducted using **microscopic and morphological characteristics**.

3 Biochemical Analysis

The decomposition efficiency was assessed by measuring changes in **cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin content**. **Cellulase enzyme activity** was analyzed using the **dinitrosalicylic acid (DNS) method**.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1 Effect of Environmental Factors on Fungal Colonization

- **Temperature:**
  - 25°C supported **the highest fungal diversity and decomposition rate**.
  - 35°C favored thermophilic fungi (*Aspergillus*, *Penicillium*) but reduced overall diversity.
  - 15°C slowed decomposition significantly.
- **Moisture Levels:**
  - 60% moisture promoted **optimal fungal succession and enzymatic activity**.
  - 90% moisture limited oxygen availability, reducing fungal efficiency.
  - 30% moisture slowed microbial growth and organic matter breakdown.
- **pH Conditions:**
  - Neutral pH (7) was **most conducive for fungal growth and enzyme production**.
  - Acidic pH (4) restricted ligninolytic activity but favored *Trichoderma* and *Fusarium*.

- Alkaline pH (9) reduced fungal colonization but supported *Curvularia*.

- **Oxygen Availability:**
  - Aerobic conditions facilitated **rapid fungal succession and decomposition**.
  - Anaerobic conditions **slowed fungal activity**, favoring bacterial degradation.

2 Biochemical Changes in Leaf Litter

- **Cellulose decomposition** was highest (**95% reduction**) under moderate temperature and moisture.
- **Hemicellulose degradation** peaked under neutral pH conditions.
- **Lignin breakdown** was most efficient under aerobic conditions, reducing by **40% over 180 days**.

These findings confirm that **environmental conditions strongly influence microfungal decomposition efficiency**.

V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that **temperature, moisture, pH, and oxygen levels** significantly affect fungal colonization and decomposition in *Brassica* leaf litter. **Optimal decomposition occurred at 25°C, 60% moisture, and neutral pH under aerobic conditions.** These findings provide practical applications for **enhanced agricultural waste management and composting strategies**.

VI. FUTURE SCOPE

- Studying **genetic adaptations of fungi** to extreme environmental conditions.
- Developing **biofertilizers based on decomposer fungi**.
- Investigating **microbial interactions in organic waste recycling**.
- Applying **fungal biotechnology for large-scale agricultural waste management**.

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