

## Evaluation of different soilless substrate on growth and yield of Capsicum “(*Capsicum annuum var. grossum*)”

### Abstract

The greenhouse experiment was conducted at the Department of Horticulture, ITM University, Gwalior (M.P) to assess the impact of different growing media, and varieties of capsicum in the soilless culture. The experiment was conducted in a factorial completely randomized design consisting of three growing media (cocopeat (M<sub>1</sub>), vermicompost (M<sub>2</sub>), 1:1 mixture of cocopeat(M<sub>3</sub>), and vermicompost), and three varieties indrani, mahabharath, and california wonder) and replicated thrice. The results revealed that, the all growth parameters except numbers of branches were significantly (p<0.05) higher in M<sub>3</sub>. Among different varieties, indrani recorded the tallest plant height and numbers of leaves while, California wonder had greater number of branches on main stem, and leaf area than the remaining variety. However, the yield parameters viz. numbers of flowers/ plant, number of fruits/plant, locale number was obtained higher in California wonder grown in substrate M<sub>3</sub>. In contrast the fruit length, fruit diameter, pericarp thickness, fruit weight, fruit weight/ plant were higher in mahabharat grown in substrate M<sub>3</sub>. Therefore, our result suggested the use of M<sub>3</sub> and M<sub>1</sub> for higher growth, and yield parameters of capsicum in soilless cultivation, respectively.

**Keywords – Capsicum, Growing media, Growth and Yield.**

### Introduction

Globally, *Capsicum annuum var. grossum* is an important vegetable for domestic and commercial use after tomato, and is a member of the solanaceous family (Khan *et al.*, 2012). It is also known as bell pepper, which was first grown in the American tropics, and now grown across globe for processing, and dried goods. The high nutritional content, color, flavor, and domestic market demand, makes it most significant vegetables crops grown in Indian condition. However, the limited availability of land per person, and vagaries of weather has threatened the cultivation of capsicum in an open field. Further, intense soil based crop cultivation in the green revolution

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led to reduced soil fertility, increased **soil** salinity and insect-pest infestation (Thapa *et al.*, 2016). Thus, it resulted in consistently low yields, and poor crop quality and becomes a major challenge to feed the ever increasing population. Therefore, the soil-less culture can be introduced successfully to obtain higher **system** yield, efficient use of available resources and to mitigate the impact of climate change (Butler & Oebker, 2006). The soilless culture is an artificial means of providing plants with support and reservoir for nutrients, and water (Bilderback *et al.*, 2005). Soilless growing media are **it is** easier to handle and may provide a better growing environment compared to **soil** (Bilderback *et al.*, 2005; Mastouriet *et al.*, 2005). Further, replacing soils by soilless growing media could be a viable alternative to overcome the infestation of soil borne pathogens, reduce pesticide use, nitrate pollution and improves yield and quality. In India soilless culture techniques are not in limelight as a result there hasn't been much research or material produced in this area in our country. Thus, the major objectives of this experiment was to find out the best growing media with respect to growth, and yield of capsicum under soilless culture, and to popularize soilless culture for producing capsicum in the semi-urban and urban areas.

## Materials and Methods

The present experiment was conducted in naturally ventilated greenhouse during *Rabi* season (2022) in the experimental farm of ITM University, Gwalior (M.P). The experiment was set up in factorial completely randomized design with three replications. The treatments comprised of three growing media viz. cocopeat, vermicompost, 1:1 mixture of cocopeat and vermicompost, and three capsicum varieties viz. Indrani, Mahabharath, **California** wonder. The nine treatments combinations viz. M<sub>1</sub>V<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>2</sub>V<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>3</sub>V<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>1</sub>V<sub>2</sub>, M<sub>2</sub>V<sub>2</sub>, M<sub>3</sub>V<sub>2</sub>, M<sub>1</sub>V<sub>3</sub>, M<sub>2</sub>V<sub>3</sub>, and M<sub>3</sub>V<sub>3</sub> was arranged randomly in 60 x 60 cm distance of the polypackets. The treatment details were given in table 1. Firstly, the seed tray was filled with growing media i.e. cocopeat, and seeds of selected varieties was sown in 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022 on a seed tray that contains forty seedling per tray. After sowing the seed tray was covered with mulch for 15 days and watering was done using fine water cane. When the seedlings are ready to transplant in 35 days, and they are placed in polypackets that measure **20 cm (L) by 20 cm (W) by 35 cm (H)**. All the standard recommended cultural practices were followed to raise a successful crop during the course of investigation. The observations were recorded from randomly selected plants. The growth

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parameters were recorded throughout the growing period at different crop growth stages. While the yield, and quality parameters were recorded after the harvest of the crop.

**Table 1.** Treatments details of the experiment

Treatments	Combinations	Treatment Notations
T1	Cocopeat + Indrani	M <sub>1</sub> V <sub>1</sub>
T2	Vermicompost + Indrani	M <sub>2</sub> V <sub>1</sub>
T3	Mixture Cocopeat + Vermicompost (1:1) + Indrani	M <sub>3</sub> V <sub>1</sub>
T4	Cocopeat + Mahabharath	M <sub>1</sub> V <sub>2</sub>
T5	Vermicompost + Mahabharath	M <sub>2</sub> V <sub>2</sub>
T6	Mixture Cocopeat + Vermicompost (1:1) + Mahabharath	M <sub>3</sub> V <sub>2</sub>
T7	Cocopeat + California wonder	M <sub>1</sub> V <sub>3</sub>
T8	Vermicompost + California wonder	M <sub>2</sub> V <sub>3</sub>
T9	Mixture Cocopeat + Vermicompost (1:1) + California wonder	M <sub>3</sub> V <sub>3</sub>

## Results and Discussion

### Plants growth characters:-

The different growing media had a significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) effect on the growth parameters of capsicum Table. 2. The maximum plant height (66.08 cm) was obtained in the mixture of cocopeat + vermicompost. While the least plant height (41.97cm) was obtained in cocopeat singly as growing media. The higher plant height, in the cocopeat, and vermicompost mixture could be attributed to the greater physico-chemical qualities of the mixture as compared to vermicompost, and cocopeat alone. This was also reported by Brunda and Singh (2023). With regards to varieties the tallest plant height (61.00 cm) was observed in Indrani, whereas Mahabharath had the lowest (51.47 cm) values. Which was mainly due to greater availability of different macro and micro nutrients thus helps in improved metabolism.

Further, the highest number of leaves per plant (89.31) was obtained under cocopeat + vermicompost mixture and least (37.16) under cocopeat alone. This might be attributed to synergistic effects of different growing media on the plants' growth, and development. Similar

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findings were made in the study conducted by Thapa *et al.*, (2016). Among different varieties the Indrani had highest leaves per plant (74.55). While the California wonder produced the lowest number of leaves per plant (55.95). The results may be due to varying genotypic potential of the varieties and their differential response to soilless culture. Similarly, the combination of cocopeat+vermicompost and cocopeat alone produced the highest (55.06 cm) and lowest (48.66) leaf area, respectively. More leaf area might be due more leaf number in the plant. Similar result was given by Roy *et al.*, (2011) and Kumar and Kohli (2005) in Capsicum. Among the varieties the highest leaf area was observed in California wonder (53.22 cm) which was closely followed by Indrani. In contrast the lowest leaf area (51.20 cm) was obtained with Mahabharath. This is mainly due to higher uptake of macro and micronutrients which stimulates the metabolic processes and the accumulation of additional metabolites in plant tissues. The total number of branches did not differ significantly with both varieties, and growing media. However, the cocopeat + vermicompost had maximum number of branches per plant (4.62) while the least number of branches (3.70) on the main stem was observed in cocopeat alone. Similar observation was studied by Dash *et al.*, (2021). The result could be due to the presence of vermicompost, contains auxin, which is a plant growth regulator that is crucial for branching. Among the varieties total number of branches was observed in California wonder (4.38) which was closely. In contrast the lowest number of branches on main stem (4.27) was obtained with Indrani.

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**Table 2.** Influence of growing media and variety on different plant growth characters

Treatments	Plant Height (cm)	No. of leaves per plants	Leaf area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	No. of branches on main stem
Cocopeat	41.97	37.16	48.66	3.70
Vermicompost	57.02	64.69	52.54	4.61
Cocopeat + Vermicompost (1:1)	66.08	89.31	55.06	4.62
<i>SE (m) ±</i>	1.29	0.98	0.25	0.08
<i>C.D. (P=5%)</i>	3.87	2.94	0.76	0.24
Indrani	61.00	74.55	51.83	4.27

Mahabharath	51.47	60.66	51.20	4.29
California Wonder	52.61	55.95	53.22	4.38
<i>SE (m) ±</i>	1.29	0.98	0.25	0.08
<i>C.D. (P=5%)</i>	3.87	2.94	0.76	NS

### Yield attributes and Yield

The different growing media and varieties had a significant impact on the yield attributes and capsicum yield (Table 3). Plants grown in the mixture of cocopeat + vermicompost took the minimum days to flower (72.55) days, while those grown in cocopeat took the maximum days to flower of (83.82) days. This might be due to increased nutrient status, and uptake in soilless media combined with organic fertilizers like vermicompost. This was earlier reported by Singh *et al.*, 2017 and Thapa *et al.*, 2016 in Capsicum. Among different cultivars, the Indrani gave the earliest flowers at approximately (73.78) days after transplanting, and California wonder takes longer time (79.98)days. The careful examination of the data revealed that the minimum values for days to 50 per cent flowering (83.95) days taken by the mixture of cocopeat + vermicompost, and maximum values of days (95.03) days was taken by cocopeat. Which was mainly ascribed to the optimal levels of nutrient status in the media, as well as favorable growing circumstances such as temperature, light, and relative humidity in the green house might be the reasons for early flowering (Hazarika *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the Indrani gave the earliest 50 percent flowering at 85.6 days after transplanting, and California wonder takes longer time (91.00) days. Plants planted in a cocopeat + vermicompost mixture produce the most flowers per plant (34.15) flowers, whereas plants grown in cocopeat produce the fewest flowers per plant (20.85). The result may be due to physical and the chemical properties of mixed media that can increase flowering numbers. Similar observation was found by Sharma and Godara 2017. With regards to varieties the California wonder gave the maximum number of flowers per plant at (29.29) and Mahabharath gave the lowest number of flowers per plants (24.97). It was revealed from the present experiment that the 50 percent fruit set shows the significant differences among the various growing media. The minimum numbers for days to 50 per cent fruit set (98.91),days taken by the mixture of cocopeat + vermicompost and maximum values of days(114.47) was taken by cocopeat. The result may be due to their inherited characters, and the early adaptation to

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the growing media to enhance their growth and development. This agrees with the report of (Hazarika *et al.*, 2022). Among different varieties the Indrani gave the earliest 50 percent fruit set (102.06) days after transplanting, and California wonder takes longer time (107.64) days. Among the number of fruits per plants a highly significant difference was found between growing media and varieties. The maximum number of fruits per plant of (14.86) was obtained when the mixture of cocopeat + vermicompost was used as the growing medium. Number of fruits per plant was lowest (7.49) with cocopeat as growing medium. The result may be due to ideal conditions for good growth of plants in the mixture medium giving way to higher yield. Gungor and Yildirim (2013) also found the same result that mixture of different growing media has a significant effect on total number of fruits per plant in pepper. Amongst the varieties California wonder produced the highest number of fruits per plant (12.90), while Mahabharath produced the lowest (10.99). In the table 3 shows that there was statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) effect of different growing media as well as different varieties on days to first marketable harvest. **Plants grown in the mixture of cocopeat+ vermicompost took the lowest days (122.13) to produce marketable fruits.** The present investigation gets support from Indirabai and Sujapratha (2009) who claimed that vermicompost contains a high amount of nutrients, and can help plants to promote growth, advance flowering, and fruiting in the lady's finger. Amongst the varieties Indrani took the least number of days to produce first marketable fruits (126.58 days) and California wonder took longest to produce first marketable fruits (131.57) days. The current experiment revealed that that the different parameters such as fruit length, fruit diameter pericarp thickness and locule numbers of fruits varied was significantly across the treatments. The fruit length (9.11 cm), fruit diameter of (7.44) cm, pericarp thickness of (0.72) cm and locule number of (4.47) were recorded in cocopeat+ vermicom post. Vamsi *et al.*, (2021) also reported a significant effect of the mixture cocopeat + vermicompost + FYM + Neem Cake on different fruit characters. Among all the varieties Mahabharath showed the highest fruit length of (7.93) cm, highest fruit diameter of (6.62) cm, maximum pericarp thickness of (0.70) cm and variety California wonder shows maximum locule number of (3.85). For locule number, the effect of variety was significant. The Mahabharath variety had the lowest locule number (3.53). The locule number from each growing medium was statistically significant. **The mixture consisting of cocopeat + vermicompost had the highest locule number of (4.00) and was often used as growth media, followed by vermicompost (3.49) and cocopeat (3.47).** The result may be due to

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genotypic potential of the varieties and their differential response to soilless culture. Similar report was also reported by Shrestha and Kang, (2018). The best-performing medium, a mixture of cocopeat and vermicompost, produced fruit with an average weight of (134.98) g. The least fruit weight (108.15 g) was produced when cocopeat is used as growing medium. This may have been due to a high nutritional intake rate, and the development of adequate photosynthesis, which allowed fruits to grow in size (length and breadth). Similar results were noted by Subramani *et al.*, 2020. Among the different varieties, the Mahabharath's had highest fruit weight (132.31) g, while California Wonder produced lowest fruit weight of (113.00) g. Growing media showed significant effect on the crucial aspect of fruit weight per plant. Maximum fruit weight per plant of (2.03) kg was obtained from the mixture of cocopeat+vermicompost. While plants grown in Cocopeat produced the lowest fruit weight per plant of (0.83) kg. The result may be due to due to a high nutritional intake rate, and the development of adequate photosynthesis, which allowed fruits to grow in size (length and breadth). Similar results were noted by Kurubetta *et al.*, (2008). Among all the varieties Mahabharath produced the highest fruit weight per plants (1.55) kg .While, Indrani gave the lowest fruit weight of (1.45) kg. Fruit weight per plant was significant varied among the variety as well as growing media. The highest fruit weight per plant of (2.03) kg was obtained in mixture of cocopeat + vermicompost which was closely followed by vermicompost alone has 1.63 kg. Whereas the lowest fruit weight per plant was produce from cocopeat (0.83) kg. The outcome may be due to varying genotypic potential of the varieties along with their varying responses to soilless culture. According to Vogel and Schodel (1992) crops cultivated in soilless culture yielded 75% more than crops grown traditionally.

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**Table 3.** Influence of Growing media and variety on different yield and yield attributing characters

Treatments	Days to first flowering (Days)	50% flowering (Days)	No. of flower/ plant	50% fruit set (Days)	No. of fruits/ plant	Days to first marketable harvest (Days)
Cocopeat	83.82	95.03	20.85	114.47	7.49	138.41
Vermicompost	73.42	85.50	26.73	100.48	13.43	126.19
Cocopeat + Vermicompost	72.55	83.95	34.15	98.91	14.86	122.13

Vermicompost

(1:1)

<i>SE (m) ±</i>	0.53	0.49	0.44	0.49	0.16	0.41
<i>C.D. (P=5%)</i>	1.58	1.47	1.34	1.47	0.49	1.22
Indrani	73.78	85.64	27.47	102.06	11.89	126.58
Mahabharath	76.02	87.83	24.97	104.16	10.99	128.58
California	79.98	91.00	29.29	107.64	12.90	131.57
Wonder						
<i>SE (m) ±</i>	0.53	0.49	0.44	0.49	0.16	0.41
<i>C.D. (P=5%)</i>	1.58	1.47	1.34	1.47	0.49	1.22

**Table 4.** Influence of Growing media and variety on different yield and yield attributing characters

Treatments	Fruit length (cm)	Fruit diameter (cm)	Pericarp thickness (mm)	Locule number	Fruit weight (g)	Fruit weight/plant (kg)
Cocopeat	5.54	4.50	0.64	3.47	108.15	0.83
Vermicompost	6.86	5.95	0.64	3.49	120.86	1.63
Cocopeat + Vermicompost (1:1)	9.11	7.44	0.72	4.00	134.98	2.03
<i>SE (m) ±</i>	0.08	0.08	0.01	0.06	0.64	0.02
<i>C.D. (P=5%)</i>	0.25	0.25	0.03	0.19	1.94	0.06
Indrani	6.97	5.97	0.65	3.57	118.69	1.45
Mahabharath	7.93	6.62	0.70	3.53	132.31	1.55
California Wonder	6.61	5.29	0.65	3.85	113.00	1.50
<i>SE (m) ±</i>	0.08	0.08	0.01	0.06	0.64	0.02
<i>C.D. (P=5%)</i>	0.25	0.25	0.03	0.19	1.94	0.06

## Conclusion

Based on the results obtained in present studies, all the growth parameters expect numbers of branches on main stem were significantly higher in M3 (mixture of cocopeat + vermicompost (1:1)). Accordingly, in the variety the highest plant height and numbers of leaves was recorded higher from variety Indrani other than this number of branches on main stem and leaf area were higher in California wonder variety. For the yield parameters the study revealed that the earliest variety to attain days to first flowering, days to 50% flowering, days to 50% fruit set, days to first marketable harvest were recorded from Indrani variety in growing media M3. The highest numbers of flowers per plant, number of fruits per plant, locule number were higher from California wonder variety in growing media M3. Similarly Fruit length, fruit diameter, pericarp thickness, fruit weight, fruit weight/ plant were higher in Mahabharath variety with the growing media M3. Based on the result it may be concluded that for the growth and yield parameters growing substract M3 can be successfully used to obtain better growth and yield of Capsicum in soilless cultivation.

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