

**Original Research Article**  
**Postharvest shelf life and quality retention potentials of Neem, Moringa and synthesized silver nanoparticles coatings on *Solanum lycopersicum* L. (Tomato) fruits**

**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this research was to evaluate the effect of *neem (Azadirachta indica)* and *moringa (Moringa oleifera)* leaf extract on the shelf life and quality retention of *tomato (Solanum lycopersicum L.) (Tomato)* fruits during storage. Thirty-five (35) matured tomato fruits were collected, rinsed and grouped for each treatment with neem and moringa coating: Control (n=5), *Moringa* aqueous leaf extract (MALE) (n=5), *Neem* aqueous leaf extract (NALE) (n=5), 1:9 and 6:4, *Moringa* aqueous leaf extract synthesized silver nanoparticles (MALE-AgNPs) (n=5), 1:9 and 6:4, *Neem* aqueous leaf extract synthesized silver nanoparticles (NALE-AgNPs) (n=5). The firmness, shelf life, and post-harvest decay percentage of the tomato fruits were determined using standard procedures. Additionally, fungi associated with the postharvest deterioration of the fruits were isolated and identified using standard procedures. From the results of this study, tomato fruits coated with either neem or moringa crude extract showed the longest shelf life, as compared to the coating with AgNPs. Additionally, two fungi, namely *Aspergillus niger* and *A. flavus*, were isolated from the decayed fruits. In conclusion, the neem and moringa leaf extracts are effective in the extension of the shelf life and retention of the quality of tomato fruits.

*Keywords: Azadirachta indica, Moringa oleifera, Tomato fruits, Post-harvest, Shelf-life, Preservatives*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

*Tomato (Solanum lycopersicum L.) Solanum lycopersicum L. (tomato)* is widely grown and consumed in Nigeria, serving as a valuable source of vitamins and minerals [1]. Tomato is a commonly consumed fruit that is vital for health, and therefore available fresh or in paste form [2]. However, the perishability of tomatoes poses challenges for farmers and consumers, affecting the quality and safety of the fruits. Addressing the shelf life is crucial to meet consumer demands and ensure a stable tomato supply [3].

Plant nutraceuticals ~~as antioxidant and antimicrobial agents in food preservations~~ are sourced from different plant parts ~~as antioxidant and antimicrobial agents in food preservations~~ and ~~due to their contains~~ excellent ~~source of~~ natural bioactive compounds like polyphenols and terpenoids [4]. The extracts of these plants are increasingly considered ~~as~~ natural preservatives, potentially replacing synthetic counterparts such as ~~S~~sodium hypochlorite, ~~S~~sodium metabisulphite, and ~~C~~calcium chloride in various applications [5]. ~~Moringa oleifera (Moringa) Moringa (Moringa oleifera)~~ is recognized for the abundance of bioactive compounds, particularly in its leaves, which are rich in vitamins, carotenoids, polyphenols, phenolic acids, flavonoids, alkaloids, glucosinolates, isothiocyanates, tannins, and saponins [6,7]. ~~These~~ ~~The~~ embedded ~~numerous~~ bioactive compounds ~~of in Moringa oleifera its~~ leaves contribute to ~~its~~ various pharmacological properties [8,9,10]. ~~Azadirachta indica (Neem) Neem (Azadirachta indica)~~ on the other hand, is a widely available plant that contains phytochemicals [11], ~~that which~~ can inhibit spoilage-causing micro-organisms in tomatoes, and also preserve its level of nutrients [12]. ~~The~~ ~~various~~ phytoconstituents of ~~A. indica its~~ leaves contribute to ~~its~~ various attributed biological activities including, antioxidant, antidiabetic, antimicrobial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, anti-tumor, anti-cancer, anti-fertility [13]. ~~As~~

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a result of various phytochemical and bioactive compounds richness of neem and moringa. Since these plants are rich in phytochemical and bioactive compounds, this study aimed to investigate the effect of the leaf extracts of these plants and its synthesized silver-nanoparticles on the shelf life and quality retention of tomato fruits during storage.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

### 2.1 Collection of Samples and Extraction Process Coating Materials Preparation and Fruit Samples Collection

Fresh leaves of *A. indica* (neem) and *M. oleifera* (moringa) were obtained at the back of the Lagos State University sports center and a residential area at Adexson, Lagos State, respectively, and were identified and authenticated at the Herbarium of the Department of Botany, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. The dried leaves were blended to get the powder. The powder was then sieved and kept in separate air-tight conical flasks.

Forty (40) matured, ripe, firm, smooth, and healthy tomato fruits were obtained from a local food and fruits market, Iyana Iba market, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. The tomatoes were divided into five for each treatment and control groups.

### 2.2 Treatment of Tomato with Neem and Moringa

The tomato fruits were washed under running clean water and air-dried at room temperature. Neem/Moringa aqueous leaf extracts were prepared by dissolving 70g of Neem/ Moringa leaf powder in 350 mL distilled water separately. Five The tomato samples each were immersed in either neem/ moringa-neem and moringa aqueous leaf extract respectively before being arranged in a Petri dish (improper words, please rephrase it because petri dish is used for microbial culture, is it container?), and kept at room temperature on the laboratory table. Changes were observed and data were recorded to ascertain the effects of the extracts.

### 2.3 Silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) preparation

The leaf powder of Neem and Moringa (100 g each) were dissolved in 1000 mL distilled water, filtered, and stored separately. The silver nanoparticles were prepared with some modifications. According to a modified method of [14], a freshly prepared 2 mM silver nitrate solution was mixed with Neem and Moringa aqueous leaf extract separately in ratios 1:9 and 4:6, respectively. The color change indicated silver nanoparticle synthesis, and was further confirmed by observing an absorption peak between 400 – 450 nm using UV-visible spectrophotometer. Five-The tomatoes each were immersed in each AgNPs solution for 2 hours before being placed in a Petri dish (please check this phrase, is it correct?) in the laboratory at 25°C. Changes were observed and data were recorded to ascertain the effects of the synthesized AgNPs.

### 2.4 Data collection

The collected data were recorded and calculated using post-harvest decay percentage (PDP), marketability, shelf-life, and firmness.

$$\text{Post-harvest decay percentage (PDP)} = \frac{\text{number of decaying fruits}}{\text{total number of fruits}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Marketability} = \frac{\text{number of Marketable fruits}}{\text{total number of fruits}} \times 100$$

Firmness = rating scale 1 - 5

Where 1= is very poor, 2 is poor, 3 is Acceptable, 4 is good, and 5 is excellent.

### 2.5 Isolation and Identification of fungi causing spoilage of Tomato fruits during storage

Potato dextrose agar was used for the isolation of fungi from the tomato fruits and the preparation of pure culture. Thirty-nine grams (39g) of potato dextrose agar was dissolved in 1000 mL of distilled water in a sterile conical flask covered with cotton wool and aluminum foil paper. The mixture was shaken thoroughly and autoclaved at 121°C for 15 minutes under a pressure of 15 pounds per square inch (15lb/inch<sup>2</sup>). The medium was cooled after autoclaving to 45°C and then dispensed aseptically into a sterile Petri dish. Chloramphenicol was added to the medium to prevent the growth medium. The workbench was disinfected, and a sterilized cork-borer was used to extract pieces from a diseased tomato, which were placed into the medium. After 5 days of incubation at 37°C, mixed cultures were re-isolated until obtaining a pure culture. Identification was based on morphological features and microscopic examination using lactophenol cotton blue solution, following [15] description.

## 2.6 Statistical Analysis

The daily weight of the coated tomatoes was recorded in triplicates and the data were subjected to the univariate statistical analysis such as mean and standard deviation (SD) using Statistix 10 software. The means were separated using analysis of variance and comparison were made through the Least Significance Difference (LSD) at a 95% confidence level.

## 3. RESULTS

The 15-day experiment showed that the control group tomatoes spoiled by the 8th day, losing its firmness from the 5th day. However, tomatoes coated with Neem aqueous leaf extract synthesized silver nanoparticles (NALE-AgNPs) solution (4:6 ratio) lasted 12 days, with significant weight loss from day 6. Another variant (1:9 ratio) lasted 14 days before a significant weight loss that led to the complete deterioration by day 15. Tomatoes coated with neem aqueous leaf extract had the longest shelf life, losing firmness at day 8 and deteriorating completely by day 15.

**Table 1. Effects of *Azadirachta indica* aqueous leaf extract and *Azadirachta indica*-synthesized AgNPs on the shelf life of *Solanum lycopersicum***

Groups/Days	Control	NALE	Nano 1	Nano 2
IW1	91.5±4.64 <sup>a</sup>	74.57±12.26 <sup>ab</sup>	80.87±4.92 <sup>ab</sup>	83.23± 8.14 <sup>a</sup>
IW2	91.50± 4.64 <sup>a</sup>	84.3± 12.50 <sup>a</sup>	81.97± 4.88 <sup>a</sup>	84.80± 8.41 <sup>a</sup>
DAT 1	89.60± 4.32 <sup>a</sup>	79.03 ± 12.08 <sup>ab</sup>	80.83± 3.85 <sup>abc</sup>	83.00± 8.29 <sup>a</sup>
DAT 2	88.07 ± 4.16 <sup>ab</sup>	76.70± 12.08 <sup>ab</sup>	78.83± 3.23 <sup>abc</sup>	81.47± 8.11 <sup>a</sup>
DAT 3	82.33 ± 3.61 <sup>bc</sup>	75.33± 13.25 <sup>ab</sup>	76.13± 4.37 <sup>abcd</sup>	80.23± 7.88 <sup>a</sup>
DAT 4	79.30 ± 6.67 <sup>c</sup>	75.30± 11.98 <sup>ab</sup>	72.57± 5.50 <sup>bcde</sup>	78.37±7.04 <sup>ab</sup>
DAT 5	75.80 ±6.05 <sup>cd</sup>	73.37±13.20 <sup>ab</sup>	73.30±4.03 <sup>cde</sup>	78.83± 8.34 <sup>ab</sup>
DAT 6	70.30± 4.21 <sup>de</sup>	72.60 ±13.1 <sup>ab</sup>	71.10± 4.33 <sup>def</sup>	76.50±7.02 <sup>abc</sup>
DAT 7	66.57 ± 4.10 <sup>de</sup>	71.87± 12.64 <sup>ab</sup>	68.57± 5.31 <sup>defg</sup>	74.27± 6.12 <sup>abcd</sup>
DAT 8	61.93 ± 4.73 <sup>f</sup>	71.40 ± 12.47 <sup>ab</sup>	67.27 ± 5.14 <sup>efg</sup>	69.20± 4.50 <sup>bcd</sup>
DAT 9	0	70.93 ± 12.14 <sup>ab</sup>	65.97± 4.97 <sup>efg</sup>	67.40 ± 2.94 <sup>cde</sup>
DAT 10	0	67.60± 11.00 <sup>ab</sup>	64.73 ± 4.73 <sup>fg</sup>	65.00 ±1.39 <sup>de</sup>
DAT 11	0	64.33 ± 11.75 <sup>ab</sup>	63.83± 4.39 <sup>fg</sup>	57.33± 0.75 <sup>ef</sup>
DAT 12	0	62.87 ± 12.24 <sup>b</sup>	62.87 ± 4.27 <sup>g</sup>	49.40± 0.35 <sup>f</sup>

Means ± S.D values on the row showing different alphabet are significantly different at  $P < 0.05$ , where, NALE= Neem aqueous leaf extract, Nano 1 = Neem aqueous leaf extract dissolved in  $\text{AgNO}_3$  at 100:900 mL, and Nano 2 = Neem aqueous leaf extract dissolved in  $\text{AgNO}_3$  at 600:400 mL, IW1= Initial weight before Coating, IW2= Initial weight after coating.

Mean ± SEM values with the same alphabet in the same row are not significantly different from each other at  $p < 0.05$ .

The 15-day experiment revealed that all fruit samples deteriorated by the 15th day, with observable decay starting from the 5th day. White mold appeared from the 3rd day before decay. Tomato fruits coated with Moringa aqueous leaf extracts deteriorated from the 8th day, but some lasted until the 15th day. However, those coated with Moringa aqueous leaf extract synthesized silver nanoparticles (MALE-AgNPs) showed preservation until the 8th day (in a 6:4 ratio) and some lasting until the 10th day (in a 9:1 ratio). Significant differences in weight loss were observed on specific days between Moringa-coated and control fruits, as well as between silver nanoparticle-treated and control fruits.

**Table 2. Effects of Moringa oleifera aqueous leaf extract and Moringa oleifera-synthesized AgNPs on the shelf life of Solanum lycopersicum**

Groups/Days	Control	MALE	Nano 3	Nano 4
IW1	91.50 ± 4.64 <sup>a</sup>	81.73 ± 3.90 <sup>abc</sup>	93.77 ± 2.64 <sup>abc</sup>	94.07 ± 6.31 <sup>ab</sup>
IW2	91.50 ± 4.64 <sup>a</sup>	95.50 ± 5.24 <sup>a</sup>	99.30 ± 5.27 <sup>a</sup>	100.73 ± 7.94 <sup>a</sup>
DAT 1	89.53 ± 4.21 <sup>a</sup>	86.93 ± 10.47 <sup>ab</sup>	97.50 ± 5.15 <sup>ab</sup>	98.67 ± 7.72 <sup>a</sup>
DAT 2	88.07 ± 4.16 <sup>ab</sup>	82.90 ± 10.12 <sup>abc</sup>	95.03 ± 4.73 <sup>abc</sup>	95.80 ± 7.01 <sup>ab</sup>
DAT 3	82.33 ± 3.61 <sup>bc</sup>	83.83 ± 11.07 <sup>abc</sup>	89.13 ± 7.90 <sup>abcd</sup>	92.77 ± 6.92 <sup>ab</sup>
DAT 4	80.80 ± 4.08 <sup>cd</sup>	80.73 ± 9.64 <sup>abc</sup>	87.77 ± 7.42 <sup>bcd</sup>	91.50 ± 6.29 <sup>ab</sup>
DAT 5	75.80 ± 6.05 <sup>de</sup>	77.53 ± 7.75 <sup>bcd</sup>	86.57 ± 6.75 <sup>cd</sup>	90.17 ± 5.71 <sup>abc</sup>
DAT 6	72.77 ± 4.25 <sup>ef</sup>	74.13 ± 5.81 <sup>bcd</sup>	87.87 ± 6.12 <sup>bcd</sup>	89.43 ± 6.84 <sup>abc</sup>
DAT 7	68.93 ± 4.19 <sup>fg</sup>	70.67 ± 7.11 <sup>cd</sup>	85.30 ± 4.85 <sup>cd</sup>	88.00 ± 6.76 <sup>abc</sup>
DAT 8	64.67 ± 4.73 <sup>g</sup>	73.87 ± 6.12 <sup>bcd</sup>	82.60 ± 3.12 <sup>d</sup>	85.47 ± 5.77 <sup>bcd</sup>
DAT 9	0.00 ± 0.00 <sup>h</sup>	65.33 ± 11.61 <sup>d</sup>	69.97 ± 4.79 <sup>e</sup>	77.97 ± 7.08 <sup>cde</sup>
DAT 10	0.00 ± 0.00 <sup>h</sup>	64.83 ± 11.56 <sup>d</sup>	62.13 ± 7.04 <sup>e</sup>	74.47 ± 8.31 <sup>de</sup>
DAT 11	0.00 ± 0.00 <sup>h</sup>	64.33 ± 11.51 <sup>d</sup>	49.73 ± 13.28 <sup>f</sup>	68.07 ± 16.17 <sup>e</sup>
DAT 12	0.00 ± 0.00 <sup>h</sup>	63.20 ± 11.01 <sup>d</sup>	0.00 ± 0.00 <sup>g</sup>	0.00 ± 0.00 <sup>i</sup>

Means ± S.D values on the row showing different Alphabet are significantly different at  $P < 0.05$ , where, MALE= Moringa aqueous leaf extract, Nano 3 = Moringa aqueous leaf extract dissolved in  $AgNO_3$  at 100:900 mL, and Nano 4 = Moringa aqueous leaf extract dissolved in  $AgNO_3$  at 600:400 mL, IW1= Initial weight before Coating, IW2= Initial weight after coating.

Mean ± SD values with the same alphabet in the same row are not significantly different from each other at  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 3 illustrates the postharvest decay of tomato fruits during storage period of 15 days. The percentage of decay was observed to increase as the days increased. The deterioration of tomato fruits started on the 5th day with only 20 percent of both control and NALE-AgNPs (6:4) observed. Meanwhile, it was observed that, the different concentrations of MALE-AgNPs (1:9 and 6:4) delayed decay up to the 15th day.

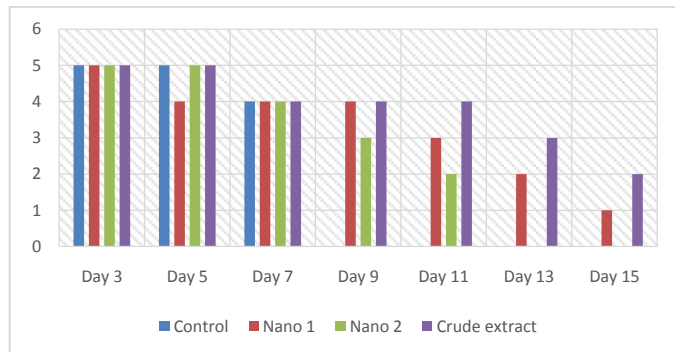
**Table 3. Post-harvest decay percentage of tomato fruit treated with Moringa aqueous leaf extracts and their synthesized silver nanoparticles at different concentrations**

	Day 3	Day 5	Day 7	Day 9	Day 11	Day 13	Day 15
Control	0	20	60	100	100	100	100
NALE	0	0	20	40	40	60	80
MALE	0	0	40	40	40	60	80
Nano 1	0	0	80	80	80	80	100
Nano 2	0	20	60	60	60	100	100
Nano 3	0	0	40	40	*	*	*

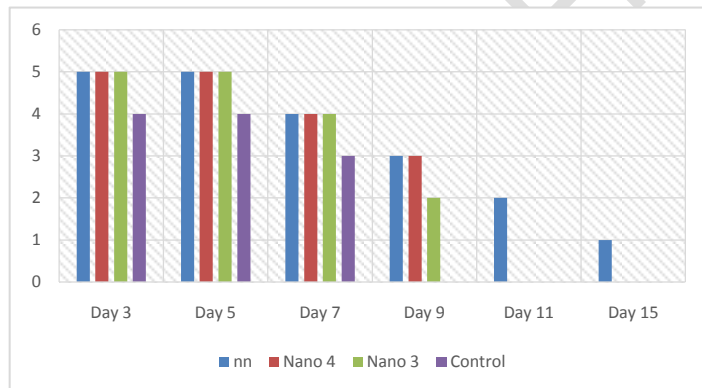
<b>Nano 4</b>	0	0	60	60	*	*	*
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Nano 1 = Neem dissolved in AgNO<sub>3</sub> at 100:900, Nano 2 = Neem dissolved in AgNO<sub>3</sub> at 400:600, Nano 3 = Moringa dissolved in AgNO<sub>3</sub> at 100:900, Nano 4 = Moringa dissolved in AgNO<sub>3</sub> at 400:600, NALE = neem dissolved in distilled water and MALE = Moringa dissolved in distilled water.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the firmness of the Tomato fruits. It was observed that the tomatoes coated with the aqueous leaf extracts of neem and moringa have the longest shelf life of 15 days compared with 8 days of Moringa and Neem silver nanoparticles and the control.



**Figure 1. Firmness of Tomato Neem aqueous leaf extracts and its synthesized AgNPs during storage.**  
Crude extract = Neem aqueous leaf extract (NALE), Nano 1= NALE-AgNPs at 100:900 mL and Nano 2= NALE-AgNPs at 600:400 mL.



**Figure 2. Firmness of Tomato coated with Moringa aqueous leaf extracts and synthesized AgNPs during storage.**  
nn= Moringa aqueous leaf extract (MALE), Nano 1= MALE-AgNPs at 100:900 mL and Nano 2= MALE-AgNPs at 600:400 mL.

A total of two fungi, *Aspergillus* species were isolated, identified, and characterized from the deteriorated tomato samples. These were *A. niger* and *A. flavus*.

*Aspergillus niger*: The conidia are dark brown to black and spherical having a sporulated surface growth on the culture media, with visible aseptate hyphae (without cross-wall).

*A. flavus*: The conidia are smooth with green dispersed spores, and septate (cross-walled) hyphae are present with phialides.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The prevention of fruit spoilage by pathogenic bacteria and preservation of fruit freshness poses a serious challenge in the fruit industry. Concerns over the use of synthetic preservatives have led to a shift towards exploring plant-based alternatives. The effectiveness of Neem and Moringa aqueous leaf extracts in reducing tomato decay observed in this study suggests that it could be a viable alternative for combating pathogen-related decay in tomatoes. This observation aligns with a study reported by [16], who reported that treating various kinds of fruits with chitosan and guava leaf extract significantly increased the shelf life of the fruits. Similarly, our findings are consistent with the report of [17], who highlighted the effectiveness of extracts from medicinal plants like *Allium sativum*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Mentha arvensis*, and *Psoralea corylifolia* in preserving fruits from the pathogenic and environmental factors. Moreover, the extract of neem increases the shelf life of the fruits by reducing the fungal and bacterial spoilage during storage.

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Tomatoes coated with moringa and neem aqueous leaf extracts exhibited reduced post-harvest decay, reflected in the lower number of decayed fruits compared to both control and NALE and MALE-synthesized silver nanoparticles. These plants also showed higher marketability with a greater number of marketable fruits in both categories. While control fruits lasted for only 8 days, most of the treated tomato fruits still retained their color and number, and became completely rotten on the 15th day. Among the treated tomato fruits with low post-harvest decay percentage were the all the tomato fruits treated with MALE-AgNPs at different concentrations had a low postharvest decay percentage. This is an implication implied that treatment with MALE-AgNPs could help tomato fruits resist environmental and pathogenic attack better than other treatments. The observed progressive weight loss in neem-coated tomatoes and control aligns with the report of [18], who stated that post-harvest weight change in fruits is typically linked to temperature and storage time, often attributed to water loss through transpiration. Thus, the higher the temperature, the higher the respiratory rate of the fruits and the higher its metabolic activity, which may lead to an increase in weight loss during storage. The higher decrease in the firmness of the control tomato fruits compared to the treated fruits may be attributed to a higher rate of metabolic activities and activity of cell wall degrading enzymes that loosens the fruit skin which result in higher permeability of the cell for higher rate of moisture loss.

In addition, the findings of this study also revealed some of the fungi associated with the post-harvest decay of the tomato fruits in storage. These fungi are *Aspergillus niger* and *A. flavus*, which have previously been reported as pathogens of tomato fruits by [19,20]. These fungi. They have also been reportedly found in other fruits/crops including orange fruits, Sour-sop fruits, and garri (fried mashed fermented cassava) [3]. Association of these fungi with these fruits/ foods may suggest their omnipresent, non-host specific and non-geographical-specific nature.

#### CONCLUSION

Our findings from this study demonstrated that Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) and Moringa (*Moringa oleifera*) leaf powder can effectively prolong the shelf life and also preserve the quality of tomato fruits beyond their typical limits. This offers a valuable information on plant leaves' potential in post-harvest preservation in addition to their known nutraceutical properties. Future studies may explore the phytochemical composition, *in vitro* and *in vivo* potentials of the leaf extract powder of the plants in preventing disease development in tomato fruits, which may possibly explicate their postharvest shelf life and quality retention potentials on tomato fruits.

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