Exploration of Fungal Pathogens Associated with Post-Harvest Diseases of Guava in Prayagraj

Abstract

To carry out this investigation, 70 diseased guava samples (5 fruits from each location) were collected from various fruit markets in Prayagraj. These samples were then taken to the laboratory of the Department of Plant Pathology at the Naini Agricultural Institute, SHUATS, Prayagraj for the purpose of isolation and identification of the pathogens. The study revealed the presence of ten fungal pathogens responsible for post-harvest diseases *viz*., *Pestalotia psidii* (37.14%), *Curvularia* sp. (15.71%), *Alternaria alternata* (11.42%), *Penicillium* sp. (8.57%), *Colletotrichum* sp. (7.14%), *Fusarium* sp. (7.14%), *Aspergillus niger* (5.71%), *Rhizopus* sp. (2.85%), *Rhizoctonia solani* (2.85%), and *Verticillium* sp. (2.58%).

Key words: *Alternaria alternata*, *Curvularia* sp., Fungal pathogens, Guava, Prayagraj, Post-harvest diseases, *Pestalotia psidii*, *Penicillium* sp.

1. Introduction

Guava (*Psidium guajava* L.) is a notable fruit in tropical and subtropical areas, known for its delicious taste and rich nutritional content (Azam *et al*., 2021). In India, it holds the fourth position in terms of importance, coming after mango, banana, and citrus fruits in both production and consumption. The country dedicates approximately 315,000 hectares to guava cultivation, resulting in a production of 45.16 million metric tons. Uttar Pradesh stands as the top guava producer in India, with Madhya Pradesh and Bihar also playing key roles in cultivation. In Uttar Pradesh alone, guava is grown on 29,000 hectares, yielding 9.83 million metric tons. The Allahabad district is especially famous for its high-quality guavas, recognized both nationally and internationally (NHB, 2021-22). Due to its perishable nature, guava is vulnerable to a range of diseases that affect all parts of the plant, including the fruit, especially under varying climatic conditions. It is susceptible to bacterial, fungal, algal, and nematode infections, as well as occasional physiological disorders, which can result in postharvest diseases (Sharma, 2021).Postharvest diseases account for an estimated 40% loss of produce, with fungal pathogens responsible for over 30% of the damage during storage and transit. Key fungal pathogens are *Alternaria* sp., *Aspergillus niger*, *Penicillium* sp., *Pestalotia psidii*, *Rhizopus stolonifer*, and *Colletotrichum gloeosporioides* (Fatima, 2019). The high sugar and nutrient content of guava, combined with its low pH, makes it particularly vulnerable to fungal decay (Singh and Sharma, 2007).

2. Materials and methods

To carry out the experiment, a total of 70 (5 samples from each fruit market) diseased guava samples were gathered from various fruit markets in Prayagraj, U.P. during October, 2023 to February, 2024. The samples were promptly transported to the Department of Plant Pathology at the Naini Agricultural Institute, SHUATS, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India. Small sections, 2-3 mm in size, were taken from both healthy and diseased parts of the fruits. These sections were surface-sterilized by soaking them in a 1% sodium hypochlorite solution for 30 seconds, then dipped in ethyl alcohol, and finally rinsed three times with sterile distilled water. The sterilized fragments were initially laid on blotting paper and then transferred to a solidified potato dextrose agar (PDA) medium under sterile conditions. The plates with the inoculated fragments were incubated at room temperature (27±1°C) in an inverted position. Fungal growth was observed, and colonies that emerged from the tissue fragments were transferred to PDA medium slants for further culturing and examination (Mahesh *et al*., 2020). The isolated fungal pathogens were examined under a compound microscope to identify their characteristic morphological features. To verify the fungal identity, observations of conidia, conidiophores, and colony morphology were compared with descriptions in standard references such as Gilman (1957), Barnett and Hunter (1972), and Nelson *et al*. (1982). The frequency of each isolated pathogens were calculated by following the formula given by Singh (2002).

$$\text{Frequency } \% = \frac{\text{No. of fruits infected with certain pathogen}}{\text{Total No. of fruits brought from market}}$$

3. Results and discussion

There were 10 fungal pathogens isolated and identified as those were associated with post-harvest decay of guava. The details about the isolated pathogens are mentioned in Table 3.

Table 1. Incidence of fungal pathogens associated with post-harvest diseases of guava in fruit markets of Prayagraj

Place of collection	Isolated pathogens	No. of samples	Frequency (%)
Naini	*Pestalotia psidii*	3	60
	Penicillium sp.	1	20
	Aspergillus niger	1	20
Khan Chauraha	*Pestalotia psidii*	2	40
	Colletotrichum sp.	2	40
	Rhizopus sp.	1	20
Rambag	*Pestalotia psidii*	2	40
	Fusarium sp.	1	20
	Aspergillus niger	1	20
	Penicillium sp.	1	20
Civil Lines	*Pestalotia psidii*	2	40
	Curvularia sp.	2	40
	Aspergillus niger	1	20
Chaka	*Pestalotia psidii*	3	60
	Colletotrichum sp.	1	20

	Curvularia sp.	1	20
Chungi	*Pestalotia psidii*	2	40
	Alternaria alternata	2	40
	Curvularia sp.	1	20
Khusroobagh	*Pestalotia psidii*	2	40
	Fusarium sp.	1	20
	Alternaria alternata	1	20
	Colletotrichum sp.	1	20
Mehewa West	*Curvularia* sp.	2	40
	Alternaria alternata	1	20
	Colletotrichum sp.	1	20
	Pestalotia psidii	1	20
Katra	*Pestalotia psidii*	2	40
	Aspergillus niger	1	20
	Penicillium sp.	1	20
	Rhizopus sp.	1	20
Medical Chauraha	*Pestalotia psidii*	2	40
	Penicillium sp.	2	40
	Alternaria alternata	1	20
Gaughat	*Curvularia* sp.	1	20
	Alternaria alternata	1	20
	Pestalotia psidii	1	20
	Fusarium sp.	1	20
	Rhizoctonia solani	1	20
Teliarganj	*Alternaria alternata*	2	40
	Fusarium sp.	1	20
	Verticillium sp.	1	20
	Pestalotia psidii	1	20
Karchana	*Curvularia* sp.	2	40
	Rhizoctonia solani	1	20
	Fusarium sp.	1	20
	Pestalotia psidii	1	20
Meja	*Curvularia* sp.	2	40
	Pestalotia psidii	2	40
	Penicillium sp.	1	20

*Five diseased guava fruit samples were collected from each location

Table 2. Overall incidence of pathogens associated with post-harvest diseases of guava in Prayagraj

Sl. No.	Pathogens	No of samples	Frequency (%)
1	*Pestalotia psidii*	26	37.14
2	*Curvularia* sp.	11	15.71
3	*Alternaria alternata*	8	11.42
4	*Penicillium* sp.	6	8.57
5	*Colletotrichum* sp.	5	7.14
6	*Fusarium* sp.	5	7.14

7	*Aspergillius niger*	4	5.71
8	*Rhizopus* sp.	2	2.85
9	*Rhizoctonia solani*	2	2.85
10	*Verticillium* sp.	1	1.42

*Total number of diseased guava fruit samples were 70

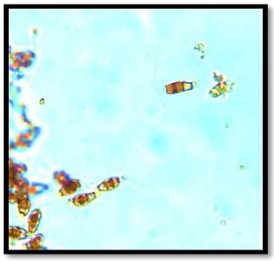
Table 3. List of fungal pathogens frequently associated with post-harvest diseases in guava

S. No.	Disease name	Causal organism	Symptoms	Morphological characteristics of pathogen
1.	Fruit canker Plate 1. (i-iii)	*Pestalotia psidii*	Reddish-brown necroticspots appear, enlarge, penetrate the pulp, and form a sunken center.	Acervuli are dark, cushion-shaped structures below the epidermis with short conidiophores. The multicellular conidia have dark bodies and hyaline apical appendages (Misra, 2004).
2.	Fruit spot Plate 1. (iv-vi)	*Curvularia* sp.	A circular honey-yellow spot grows, turns brown, and its edges blend with the surrounding healthy tissue.	Conidiophores are brown, simple, and bear spores at their tips. The dark conidia have lighter end cells, usually 3-5 cells, are fusiform, often curved, with one enlarged central cell (Misra, 2004).
3.	Fruit spot Plate 1. (Vii-ix)	*Alternaria alternata*	Blackish to brown, parched spots on the fruit's surface penetrate the inner pulp asthe condition progresses.	Colonies grow quickly with a glassy appearance and black conidia specks. Conidia, produced in long, branched chains, are cylindrical and muriform, narrowing towards the apex with a rounded basal cell (Misra, 2004).
4.	Penicilliu m rot Plate 1. (x-xii)	*Penicillium* sp.	The infected fruit turns brown, watery, and breaks easily. In severe cases, mold covers the fruit.	Conidiophores arise singly or in synnemata, branched near the apex, ending in phialides. Conidia are 1-celled, hyaline or brightly colored, globose or ovoid, arranged in basipetal chains (Bhale, 2011).
5.	Anthracno se Plate 1. (xiii-xv)	*Colletotrichum* sp.	Dark necrotic lesions develop and, in humid conditions, are overlaid with pinkish spore masses. These lesions merge, forming extensive necrotic areas that affect the fruit's flesh.	The colony ranges from white to grey. Conidia are oblong, forming asalmon-colored spore mass. Acervuli are disc-shaped or cushion-shaped, salmon to grey, with a waxy texture and dark spines among simple, unbranched conidiophores (Misra, 2004).

6.	Fruit rot Plate 1. (xvi-xviii)	*Fusarium* sp.	Impacted fruits remain small, hard, and stony with dark brown spots that enlarge, merge, and turn blackish-brown.	The mycelium forms dense masses with a pinkish hue in culture. Conidia are hyaline, varying in colors like purple or yellow, with two types: Macroconidia are curved like canoes, and microconidia are single-celled, ovoid or oblong (Misra, 2004).
7.	Aspergillus- rot Plate 1. (xix-xxi)	*Aspergillus niger*	The water-soaked spot expands, turns brown, and depresses at the center. Black conidial heads emerge on the surface as the condition advances.	The branched mycelium develops thick-walled foot cells that form a single, globose conidiophore with brown sterigmata. This structure, along with vesicles and conidia, creates the characteristic black head of the fungus (Srivastava *et.al*, 1964).
8.	Soft watery rot Plate 1. (xxii-xxiv)	*Rhizopus* sp.	As water-soaked lesions advance, they become slightly sunken, turn brown, and develop mycelial strands on the surface.	*Rhizopus* fungi grow rapidly with a cottony texture. They have a coenocytic, branched mycelium comprising stolons, rhizoids for anchorage, and sporangiophores for spore production (Ooka, 1980).
9.	Fruit rot Plate 1. (xxv-xxvii)	*Rhizoctonia solani*	Small dark brown flecks enlarge, coalesce, and become blackish-brown blotches.	Asexual fruiting bodies and spores absent. Sclerotia small, brown or black, varied shapes. Mycelium's brown hyphae elongated, septa branching from primary hyphae (Misra, 2004).
10.	Fruit rot Plate 1. (xxviii-xxx)	*Verticillium* sp.	Affected fruits become smaller. Uneven ripening, brown discoloration near stem end. Rot starts inside, abnormal development.	Transparent vegetative mycelium with septa. Conidia ovoid or ellipsoid, single-celled, produced on phialides arranged in whorls around conidiophores (Misra, 2006).

i

ii



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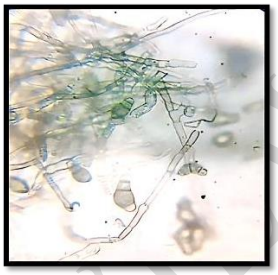

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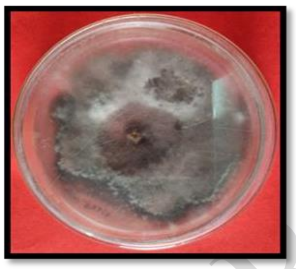

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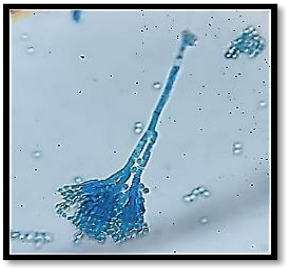

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Plate 1 (i-xv) Fssungal pathogens isolated from guava fruits (40x)

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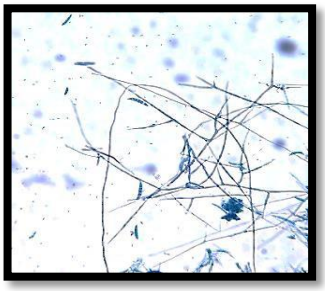

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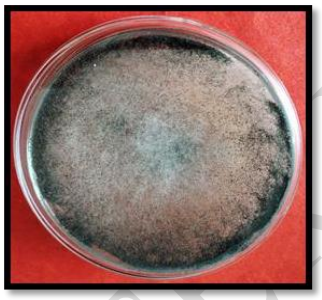

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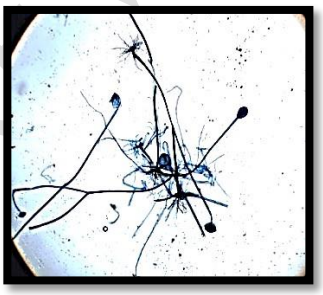

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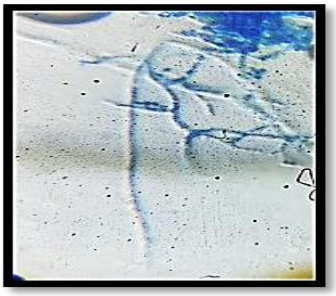

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Plate 2 (xvi-xxx) Fungal pathogens isolated from guava fruits (40x)

The occurrence of various diseases affecting guava in different fruit markets is outlined below:

In Naini, three fungal pathogens were identified: *Pestalotia psidii* (60%), *Penicillium* sp. (20%), and *Aspergillus niger* (20%). At Khan Chauraha, *P. psidii* and *Colletotrichum* sp. had the highest prevalence (40%), while *Rhizopus* sp. was at 20%. In Rambag, *P. psidii* was the most frequent (40%), followed by *Fusarium* sp., *Aspergillus* sp., and *Penicillium* sp. each at 20%. Civil Lines saw *P. psidii* and *Curvularia* sp. as the most common (40%). In Chaka, *P. psidii* was the predominant pathogen (60%). In Mehewa West, *Curvularia* sp. was most prevalent (40%), followed by *Alternaria alternata*, *Colletotrichum* sp., and *P. psidii* each at 20%. In Teliarganj, *Alternaria alternata* had the highest frequency (40%). In Karchana, *Curvularia* sp. was the most frequent, followed by *Rhizoctonia solani*, *Fusarium* sp., and *P. psidii*. Other areas like Chungi, Khusroobagh, Katra, Medical Chauraha, Gaughat, and Meja had *P. psidii* as the dominant pathogen with a frequency ranging from 20-40%.

Overall, in Prayagraj, the average incidence of post-harvest fungal pathogens in guava was highest for *P. psidii* (37.14%), followed by *Curvularia* sp. (15.71%), *Alternaria alternata* (11.42%), Penicillium sp. (8.57%), Colletotrichum sp. and Fusarium sp. (7.14%), *Aspergillus niger* (5.71%), and *Rhizopus* sp. and *Rhizoctonia solani* (2.85%). The least common was *Verticillium* sp. (1.42%).

The incidence of guava fruit rot in Prayagraj appears to have been influenced by various factors, including the presence and concentration of microbial components on the fruit surface, the physiological state of the fruit, ambient temperature, and relative humidity (Majumdar and Pathak, 1989). Among the pathogens identified, *Pestalotia psidii* had the highest incidence, recorded at 37.14%. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Srivastava and Lal (2009), who reported similar results. Additionally, Rao *et al*. (2012) observed that *P. psidii* was the most frequently isolated pathogen, responsible for 36.45% of the cases of guava fruit rot. These studies collectively highlight the significant impact of *P. psidii* on guava fruit rot and the insights gained from this research can be effectively applied to establish proper post-harvest practices, thereby enhancing the guava fruit's shelf-life.

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