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Ice Nucleation Active (INA) Agents in Freezing of Young Citrus Trees

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Abstract. Aqueous suspensions of ice nucleation active (INA) bacteria [*Pseudomonas syringae* van Hall and *Erwinia herbicola* (Löhnis) Dye] and suspensions of nonbacterial agents, silver iodide, phenazine, and fluorphlogopite, were used to induce freezing in young citrus trees, 'Valencia' orange [*Citrus sinensis* (L.) Osbeck] on sour orange (*C. aurantium* L.) rootstock. Trees sprayed with INA agents froze at higher temperatures than unsprayed trees. INA bacteria-induced freezing was significant only when leaf surfaces were allowed to dry prior to freeze tests. Leaves with dry surfaces supercooled 1° to 3°C more than wet leaves, which started to freeze, and about 1° sooner with than without INA agents. Differences between INA bacteria and nonbacterial agents were not significant in the moment of freeze of wet leaves. INA agents induced freezing in citrus leaves usually before –5°, and in water drops, before –4°. Freezing was easier to induce on the underside (abaxial) than top (adaxial) surfaces of leaves. Sucrose, proline, and expressed sap were nonINA on citrus leaves and in drops of water.

Agricultural losses due to freezes are in millions of dollars annually in the United States and billion-dollar crops such as citrus are especially vulnerable (25). Protection systems, such as the burning of petroleum fuels, rapidly are becoming economically prohibitive and the search for low-energy systems continues. Supercooling is probably the most energy-efficient freeze avoidance mechanism that assures plant survival (4, 7). In some instances, artificially induced freezing to minimize supercooling is beneficial, taking full advantage of large ice crystals and equilibrium freezing as in the protection of peach buds (13).

Supercooling is largely an unexplained and unpredictable event in the freezing of plants, but it is associated with numerous factors ranging from diameter of xylem vessels (3) and degree of vascular development (2) to the presence of heterogeneous nucleators (8, 16, 18). Temperature- and water stress-induced

cold hardening increases supercooling in citrus (20, 27), but varietal differences in supercooling do not necessarily reflect differences in cold hardiness (21).

INA agents offer some means of control. Elimination of INA nuclei may increase freeze avoidance or minimal supercooling may avoid lethal intracellular stresses. Ice nuclei, including those associated with cloud seeding (12), are being reinvestigated in crop protection systems. The most efficient and natural external ice nucleators of plants are probably INA bacteria (1, 11, 17), which have been implicated in freeze damage to crops, including citrus (18). The overall INA concept has both meteorological and agricultural implications in modeling systems to promote an adequate and nutritional world diet.

This study was conducted under controlled-temperature regimes to determine the activity of INA agents in a variety of conditions commonly associated with the freezing of citrus trees. Relative effectiveness of different INA agents on citrus leaves and potential problems in citri-culture were major concerns.

Materials and Methods

Test trials were varied to include different situations and INA agents. Trees were either self-grown or from commercial nur-

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series. Self-grown trees were 'Valencia' orange (*Citrus sinensis*) budded on 10-month-old sour orange (*C. aurantium*) rootstock grown from open-pollinated seed. Individual trees were grown in 2.5-liter plastic pots containing equal parts of sphagnum peat-moss, vermiculite, and perlite. Trees were watered as needed under natural light in a greenhouse. Maximum light approached $1 \times 10^3 \mu\text{mol s}^{-1}\text{m}^{-2}$ (PAR) with 35°C and minimum 35% relative humidity during days, and 20° minimum and 97% maximum relative humidity during nights. Trees of uniform growth and appearance were randomly selected for tests.

INA bacteria used were slant cultures of *Pseudomonas syringae*, *Erwinia herbicola*, and lyophilized *P. syringae* (courtesy of S. Lindow, Univ. of California, Berkeley) and frozen broth cultures of *E. herbicola* (courtesy of Microlife Technics, Sarasota, Fla.). Slant cultures stored at 5°C were subcultured periodically on nutrient agar containing 2.5% glycerol. Bacteria populations were grown in nutrient broth with continuous agitation at 30° for 8 hr and stored at 4° for 20 hr. Turbid broth cultures were centrifuged at $5000 \times g$ and bacteria pellets suspended in either 150 ml sterile water, 0.1 M phosphate buffer (pH 7.0), or in nutrient broth. Spray concentrations were based on pour plate dilutions. Estimates of bacterial populations prior to test sprays were the result of immersing single leaves, 3 to 5 per tree, each into 10 ml of sterile H₂O, shaking for 30 minutes on a vortex shaker, and a series of pour plate dilutions. Similar samples were taken after test sprays immediately before freeze tests. Frozen broth cultures of *E. herbicola* (Microlife Technics) were stored at -60° and contained 2×10^{10} colony-forming units (CFU) per ml. These were diluted as needed with sterile water. Antagonistic or nonINA bacteria (Microlife Technics) were treated similarly and used in conjunction with agricultural streptomycin sulfate (17% streptomycin) to inhibit INA bacteria. Lyophilized *P. syringae* at 3.6×10^{10} active ice nuclei per gram was used in 1% (w/v) freshly prepared aqueous suspensions. Other suspensions were of nonbacterial INA agents, silver iodide, phenazine, and fluorphlogopite (a synthetic mica, courtesy of C. Rajashekar, Univ. of Minnesota, St. Paul).

Spray volumes per tree ranged from 15 ml to runoff. Spraying was done between 8 and 10 AM and occurred between 0.5 to 36 hr before freeze tests. Freeze tests were conducted in the dark and $50 \pm 5\%$ relative humidity in a controlled-temperature facility (23). Induced freezing was determined visually as water-soaking in the leaves (26). The moments of freezing or threshold temperatures were based on instant release of latent heat of fusion during exothermic scans using 36-gauge, copper-constantan thermocouples. Thermocouple leads were connected to digital multimeters (1 uv per digit resolution). Accuracy was rated ± 1 digit. Reference junction was an insulated ice bath stable at $0 \pm 0.1^\circ\text{C}$. Variable speed strip-chart recorders, 0 to 100 mv, were connected to digital multimeters.

Results and Discussion

Most noticeable differences in tests with INA bacterial isolates from California were in trials using relatively high concentrations of *P. syringae* (Table 1). INA-bacteria-induced freezing was significant only when citrus leaf surfaces were allowed to dry before trees were frozen. Wet leaf surfaces started to freeze about 1°C sooner with than without INA agents. Differences in freezing of wet leaves were not significant between INA bacteria and nonbacterial agents. Nonbacterial agents apparently are as effective as INA bacteria in inducing early freezing in citrus leaves with wet but not dry surfaces. Leaves with dry surfaces supercooled to -4.4°, whereas wet leaves started to freeze at

Table 1. Number of potted 'Valencia' orange trees freezing with and without INA bacteria sprayed on the leaves.^z

Temp (°C)	Time (min)	No. trees freezing			
		<i>Pseudomonas syringae</i>		Water controls	
		Wet leaves ^y	Dry leaves ^x	Wet leaves	Dry leaves
-1.1	120	0	0	0	0
(temp decreased abruptly)					
-2.2	0	0	0	0	0
	15	0	0	0	0
	30	3	0	2	0
	60	7	0	8	0
	90	4	0	4	0
	120	2	0	2	0
Total (-2.2°C)		16	0	16	0
Percentage of population		100	0	100	0
Percentage of leaf kill/tree		18 ± 16	0	18 ± 15	0
-4.4	0	---	0	---	1
	15	---	0	---	1
	30	---	2	---	0
	60	---	4	---	1
	90	---	6	---	2
	120	---	4	---	1
Total (-4.4°C)			16		5
Percentage of population			100		31
Percentage of leaf kill/tree			16 ± 10		11 ± 6

^z 4×10^7 CFU/ml (Calif. isolate), 100 ml/tree.

^ySprayed 0 hr before freeze.

^xSprayed 15 hr before freeze.

-2.2° regardless of INA bacteria. The number of trees starting to freeze after 15 min at -4.4° averaged one tree every 6 min for INA-bacteria-sprayed trees, and one tree every 18 min for unsprayed trees. This 3-fold frequency increase attributed to INA bacteria is considered significant in the freezing of citrus trees

Table 2. Number of potted 'Valencia' orange trees freezing with and without INA bacteria sprayed on the leaves.

Spray ^z (20 ml/tree)	No. trees freezing						Population (%)
	Time at −3.3°C						
	0 hr	1 hr	2 hr	3 hr	4 hr	5 hr	
<i>E. herbicola</i> (INA) ^y	0	2	8	---	---	---	100
NonINA bacteria ^x	0	0	1	0	0	0	10
<i>E. herbicola</i> (INA)/nonINA	0	0	10	---	---	---	100
NonINA/ <i>E. her-</i> <i>bicola</i> (INA) ^y	0	4	4	2	---	---	100
Culture media	0	0	0	1	0	0	10
Water	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

^z3 days prior to freeze.

^yIsolate No. 26 (2×10^8 CFU/ml), Microlife Technics.

^xIsolate M232A (2×10^8 CFU/ml), Microlife Technics.

^wM232A sprayed immediately after Isolate No. 26.

^vIsolate No. 26 sprayed immediately after M232A.

Table 3. Accumulative number of 6-month-old 'Valencia' orange trees freezing at different temperatures with and without INA bacteria sprayed on the leaves.

Spray	No. trees freezing							Frozen (%)
	-1.1°C	-2.2°	-3.3°	-4.4°				
	2 hr	2 hr	2 hr	1 hr	2 hr	3 hr	4 hr	
<i>Erwinia herbicola</i> ^a	0	0	2	8	12	13	15	100
<i>E. herbicola</i> + agricultural streptomycin sulfate ^y	0	0	1	6	11	12	15	100
Nutrient broth	0	0	0	0	1	3	7	47
Water	0	0	0	0	3	4	6	40

^a2 × 10⁷ CFU/ml, 30 ml per tree sprayed on foliage 2 days prior to freeze, 15 trees per treatment.^b200 ppm (AI) streptomycin, about 50 ml per tree one hr after INA bacteria spray.

at a constant temperature. All trees sprayed with INA bacteria were freezing after 2 hr at -4.4° in contrast to 31% of the trees without INA bacteria. Experience suggests that most of the remaining 69% of the unfrozen trees would start to freeze with longer duration at -4.4°, with some trees supercooling to -5.5° and even to -6.7° (21). Freeze avoidance beyond -6.7° is infrequent and unpredictable in citrus trees. These observations only suggest that INA agents such as bacteria on leaf surfaces and/or other heterogenous nucleators may be inhibiting supercooling in citrus during natural freezes.

Similar results to those in Table 1 also were evident with *E. herbicola* isolates from California. No work was done in comparing the INA *E. herbicola* with *P. syringae* in any one test. Overall results from 10 different tests and 500 trees indicated considerable variability in minimizing supercooling in citrus leaves. Equal concentrations of bacteria in sprays did not necessarily produce similar results in different tests. Variable results were especially evident to tests where concentrations were 2 × 10⁷ CFU/ml or less, but in some instances, higher concentrations of INA bacteria in sprays failed to induce earlier freezing in citrus leaves. Some of this variability is attributed to growing bacterial cultures at 30°C, as well as to the culture media used in this study. Both growth temperatures and culture media influence the INA factor (1, 9, 10, 11) and, in this study, 30° may have reduced relative ice nucleation activity 10% to 25%. Temperatures in the field would affect bacterial colonization of citrus leaves and critical threshold concentrations for ice nucleation activity.

We found no significant differences in activity in our work whether bacteria were suspended in sterile H₂O, 0.1 M phosphate buffer (pH 7.0), or retained in nutrient broth culture in making different spray concentrations. We also noted no rapid growth of INA bacteria on leaves of citrus trees under greenhouse con-

ditions, unless trees were continuously misted. Before sprays, bacteria concentrations on leaves of greenhouse trees ranged from 2 × 10² to 2 × 10⁶ CFU/leaf. These concentrations of unknown bacteria were not INA when applied to leaves of 'Valencia' orange trees and supercooled equally with glass-distilled H₂O during supercooling tests of different INA agents in 0.5-ml drops of aqueous suspensions.

Spray concentrations of 2 × 10⁸ CFU/ml of INA *E. herbicola* were sufficient to cause 98% leaf kill on 15 six-month-old 'Valencia' orange trees with none of the trees avoiding injury during -4.4°C for 3 hours, 3 days after sprays. In contrast, at least 80% of the trees sprayed with media or water control solution avoided freeze injury as a result of greater supercooling and averaged less than 20% leaf kill. Neither sprays of antagonistic (nonINA) bacteria (Table 2), nor sprays of streptomycin (Table 3) significantly reduced the number of INA-bacteria trees freezing at different temperatures and durations. Apparently, antagonistic bacteria are more likely to inhibit further increases in the colonization of INA bacteria than inhibit the ice nucleation activity (8) and similarly, streptomycin can kill INA bacteria without eliminating the ice nucleation activity (12).

The ice nucleation activity of lyophilized *P. syringae* compared favorably with that of nonbacterial agents, silver iodide, phenazine, and fluorphlogopite (Tables 4 and 5). Lyophilization has some economic advantages in the preparation, storage, and use of INA material and INA bacteria probably can substitute for nonbacterial agents in a variety of uses. In one test (Table 6), it was found that INA bacteria can be substituted for nonbacterial INA agents in practical citriculture where young trees are protected with latent heat of fusion during freezing of water in plastic bags (21). The nonbacterial agent, phenazine, is known to be an effective ice nucleator in cloud seeding (5), and phenazine concentrations in fluorescent pseudomonads (*P. syringae*)

Table 4. Number of 8-month-old 'Valencia' orange trees starting to freeze at different temperatures maintained for 2 hr each with and without INA agents sprayed on the leaves to runoff one day before cold treatments.

INA agent	Concn	No. trees starting to freeze					Population (%)
		-2.2°C	-3.3°	-4.4°	-5.5°	-6.7°	
<i>Erwinia herbicola</i>	2 × 10 ⁸ CFU/ml	0	2 ^a	8	---	---	100
<i>Pseudomonas syringae</i> (lyophilized)	1% (w/v)	0	1	5	4	---	100
Silver iodide	1% (w/v)	0	2	6	2	---	100
Phenazine	1% (w/v)	0	0	4	6	---	100
Fluorphlogopite	1% (w/v)	0	1	4	5	---	100
Nutrient broth	1% (v/v)	0	0	0	3	7	100
Water	---	0	0	0	4	6	100
Control	---	0	0	0	2	8	100

^aTrees identified at the end of each temperature level, 10 trees per treatment.

Table 5. Number of 8-month-old 'Valencia' orange trees freezing at -4.4°C for 4 hr with and without INA agents sprayed on the leaves to runoff one day before cold treatment.

INA agent	Concn	No. trees freezing (-4.4°C)					Frozen (%)
		0 hr	1 hr	2 hr	3 hr	4 hr	
<i>Erwinia herbicola</i>	2×10^8 CFU/ml	0	5 ^c	2	---	---	100
<i>Pseudomonas syringae</i> (lyophilized)	1% (w/v)	0	3	2	2	---	100
Silver iodide	1% (w/v)	0	3	3	1	---	100
Phenazine	1% (w/v)	0	2	2	3	---	100
Fluorophlogopite	1% (w/v)	0	4	1	2	---	100
Nutrient broth	1% (v/v)	0	0	0	0	1	14
Water	---	0	0	0	0	1	14
None	---	0	0	0	0	0	0

^cTrees identified at the end of each hour, 7 trees per treatment.

can be manipulated with stress and media nutrition (6). The role of phenazine concentrations in INA-bacteria-induced freezing is not known. The other nonbacterial agent, fluorophlogopite, also is effective in minimizing supercooling in plants other than citrus (15).

INA bacteria and nonbacterial agents equally induced early freezing in citrus leaves in droplet freezing trials. Drops froze as early as -2.2°C with water soaking more pronounced on the abaxial than the adaxial surfaces of leaves. Ease of nucleating leaves with frozen drops at -4.4° during 1 hr averaged 23% when drops were placed on the adaxial surfaces of leaves and 83% when drops were suspended on the abaxial. The cuticular layer of citrus leaves apparently offers some resistance to ice nuclei on leaf surfaces.

The most effective INA agent in droplet freezing during non-plant freeze trials was fluorophlogopite with an average supercooling level of -2°C (Table 7). None of the drops with INA agents supercooled much beyond -3.7° in contrast to -6.1° for water. Differences in moment of freezing between INA agents and water alone probably would have been greater if a more inert surface than copper were used. Factors that are implicated in the cold hardening of citrus trees such as sucrose, proline, and concentration of expressed sap appear to promote freeze avoidance with supercooling to -7.6° for 1% (w/v) solutions of proline.

Results of this study express the vulnerability of citrus leaves to different INA agents under a variety of conditions and differences in ice nucleation activity between INA bacteria and nonbacterial agents. The role of INA agents, bacterial and nonbacterial, seemingly is significant in applied agriculture through systems management in freeze avoidance and tolerance. Whether INA bacteria pose a serious problem in freezing of citrus trees

during natural freezes cannot yet be satisfactorily answered in Florida which produces most of the citrus in the United States. Concerns that INA bacteria contribute significantly to citrus freeze damage need support in determining population dynamics of INA agents not only on leaves but also on wood (14), efficacy of antagonistic bacteria and bactericides, amount of supercooling under natural conditions, and in more detailed studies on the mode and mechanism of freezing in citrus tissues (19, 22, 24).

Table 7. Moment of freezing in 0.05-ml droplets with and without INA agents.^z

Comparisons	Agent	Concn	Moment of freezing	ΔT
1	Fluorophlogopite (INA)	1% (w/v)	-2.0	-3.9^{**}
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.9	
2	<i>Erwinia herbicola</i> (INA)	2×10^8 CFU/ml	-3.1	-2.7^{**}
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.8	
3	Lyophilized <i>Pseudomonas syringae</i>	1% (w/v)	-3.2	-2.6^{**}
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.8	
4	Silver iodide (INA)	1% (w/v)	-3.7	-2.5^{**}
	Water	000 MOSM	-6.1	
5	Phenazine (INA)	1% (w/v)	-3.7	-2.1^{**}
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.8	
6	Nutrient broth	1% (v/v)	-5.9	-0.0
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.9	
7	Sucrose	1% (w/v)	-6.8	$+0.9^{**}$
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.9	
8	Proline	1% (w/v)	-7.6	$+1.7^{**}$
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.9	
9	Expressed sap Unhardened 'Valencia' leaves	424 MOSM	-5.8	-0.1
	Water	000 MOSM	-5.9	
10	Cold-hardened 'Valencia' leaves	642 MOSM	-7.2	$+1.2^{**}$
	Water	000 MOSH	-6.0	

^zComparison of means, $n = 5$; temperature decrease 5°C per hour, continuous temperature monitoring of drops on suspended $45.7^2\text{ cm} \times 0.6$ mm thick copper sheet in controlled-temperature facility used to freeze whole plants.

^{**}Significant at 1% level.

Table 6. Ice nucleation in plastic bags containing 100 ml of water with and without INA agents.

INA agent	Concn	Amount per bag	Lowest temp. ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)	Bags nucleated (%)
<i>Erwinia herbicola</i>	2×10^8 CFU/ml	1 ml	-2.2	100
Silver iodide		10 μg	-2.0	100
Phenazine		10 μg	-2.0	100
Nutrient media		1 ml	-6.1	0
Water		---	-6.1	0

^zTemperature decrease of 4°C per hour from 1.5° to -6.1° , 7 trees per treatment.

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