

Applications and Future Prospects of Tissue Culture in Genetic Improvement of Cucumber

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Cucumber (*Cucumis sativus* L.) is a significant vegetable crop cultivated worldwide for its edible fruits. It belongs to the Cucurbitaceae family and is consumed fresh, pickled, or processed. However, cucumber cultivation faces several challenges, including susceptibility to diseases, environmental stressors, and limitations in traditional breeding techniques. The increasing demand for cucumber and the necessity for improved varieties have led to adopting of biotechnological approaches, particularly tissue culture, in cucumber breeding and genetic enhancement. Tissue culture techniques have revolutionized cucumber improvement by enabling rapid propagation, disease elimination, genetic transformation, and the development of stress-resistant varieties. This paper explores cucumber tissue culture and its applications in cucumber improvement.

Importance of Cucumber and Challenges in Cultivation

Cucumber is valued for its high-water content, low-calorie profile, and essential nutrients such as vitamins C and K, potassium, and antioxidants. It plays a crucial role in human nutrition and the agricultural economy. However, cucumber cultivation faces several challenges, including susceptibility to fungal, bacterial, and viral diseases, vulnerability to environmental stressors such as drought and salinity, and limitations in traditional breeding methods. Conventional breeding techniques are often time-consuming and constrained by genetic barriers, necessitating alternative approaches like tissue culture.

The Role of Tissue Culture in Cucumber Improvement

Plant tissue culture involves the in vitro propagation of plant cells, tissues, or organs under sterile conditions. This technique enables rapid multiplication, genetic modifications, and the development of superior cucumber varieties. Several tissue culture methods have been successfully employed to enhance cucumber breeding, including micropropagation, somatic embryogenesis, callus culture, and genetic

transformation and are briefly explained in this article.

1. Micropropagation

Micropropagation is the rapid multiplication of plant clones using tissue culture techniques. In cucumbers, this method allows the production of a large number of disease-free, genetically uniform plants. The key steps in cucumber micropropagation include:

- **Explant Selection:** Typically, shoot tips, nodal segments, or cotyledons are used as explants.
- **Sterilization and Culture Initiation:** The explants are disinfected and cultured in a suitable medium containing essential nutrients, plant growth regulators (PGRs), and carbon sources.
- **Multiplication Phase:** Cytokinins like benzylaminopurine (BAP) promote shoot proliferation.
- **Rooting and Acclimatization:** Auxins such as indole-3-butyric acid (IBA) aid in root development, followed by the hardening of plantlets for field conditions.

2. Somatic Embryogenesis

Somatic embryogenesis is the process by which somatic cells develop into embryos without fertilization. In cucumbers, this technique enhances genetic stability and uniformity in propagated plants. The advantages of somatic embryogenesis include:

- Rapid regeneration of plants.
- Development of synthetic seeds.
- Efficient conservation of elite germplasm.

3. Callus Culture and Its Applications

Callus culture involves the induction of undifferentiated plant cells (callus) from explants using high concentrations of auxins and cytokinins. This technique is crucial for:

- **Genetic Transformation:** Callus tissue serves as a medium for introducing desirable genes through Agrobacterium-mediated transformation or biolistics.
- **Somaclonal Variation:** Genetic variability generated through callus culture is useful for

selecting stress-tolerant and disease-resistant cucumber variants.

4. Genetic Transformation for Cucumber Improvement

Genetic transformation allows the incorporation of specific traits into cucumber plants, enhancing their resistance to diseases, pests, and environmental stressors. Some notable genetic modifications in cucumbers include:

- **Disease Resistance:** Introduction of genes conferring resistance to fungal pathogens (e.g., *Fusarium* and *Pseudoperonospora cubensis*).
- **Abiotic Stress Tolerance:** Incorporation of genes that improve drought and salinity tolerance.
- **Nutritional Enhancement:** Genetic modifications aimed at increasing the nutritional value of cucumbers.

Applications of plant tissue culture in Cucumber Improvement

Tissue culture plays a crucial role in cucumber breeding and genetic improvement. Some key applications include:

1. Production of Disease-Free Plants:

Cucumber plants are susceptible to bacterial wilt, powdery mildew, downy mildew, and viral infections. Tissue culture helps in developing pathogen-free plants through meristem culture and micropropagation, ensuring healthy and vigorous growth.

2. Genetic Transformation for Disease and Pest Resistance:

Genetic engineering, combined with tissue culture techniques, allows for the introduction of resistance genes into cucumber plants. Agrobacterium-mediated transformation and biolistic (gene gun) methods help in developing transgenic cucumbers resistant to viral, fungal, and bacterial pathogens.

3. Development of Stress-Tolerant Varieties:

Abiotic stresses such as drought, salinity, and extreme temperatures affect cucumber yield. Tissue culture aids in selecting and propagating stress-tolerant genotypes. Somaclonal variation and in vitro selection can be used to develop stress-resistant lines.

4. Hybrid Breeding and Polyploid Induction:

Tissue culture facilitates hybrid breeding through embryo rescue and anther culture. Embryo rescue allows for the development of interspecific hybrids that may not survive naturally. Polyploidy induction using colchicine leads to improved traits such as larger fruit size and higher yield.

5. Conservation of Germplasm: Cucumber tissue culture is useful for the long-term conservation of genetic diversity. Cryopreservation and in vitro storage techniques enable the preservation of elite and endangered germplasm,

ensuring future breeding programs have access to diverse genetic resources. Through micropropagation, somatic embryogenesis, callus culture, and genetic transformation, researchers and breeders can develop disease-resistant, stress-tolerant, and high-yielding cucumber varieties.

6. Rapid Propagation of Elite Varieties

Micropropagation enables the large-scale production of elite cucumber cultivars with desirable traits such as high yield, disease resistance, and improved fruit quality. This helps in meeting the increasing market demand for high-performing cucumber varieties.

Future Prospects and Challenges

The advancements in tissue culture techniques provide immense potential for cucumber breeding. However, some challenges remain, including:

Somaclonal Variation: While beneficial for genetic diversity, uncontrolled somaclonal variation may lead to undesirable traits.

Regeneration Efficiency: Some cucumber cultivars exhibit recalcitrance, making tissue culture-based improvements difficult.

Biosafety and Regulatory Concerns: The application of genetically modified cucumbers may face regulatory hurdles and consumer acceptance issues.

Conclusion

Tissue culture plays a pivotal role in the genetic improvement of cucumbers, offering sustainable solutions to agricultural challenges. Cucumber tissue culture has emerged as a powerful tool in plant biotechnology for enhancing cucumber breeding and genetic improvement. Through micropropagation, somatic embryogenesis, callus culture, and genetic transformation, researchers and breeders can develop disease-resistant, stress-tolerant, and high-yielding cucumber varieties. With continued research and technological advancements, the integration of tissue culture techniques with modern breeding strategies will revolutionize cucumber cultivation, ensuring higher yields, disease resistance, and improved stress tolerance. As plant biotechnology progresses, cucumber tissue culture will remain a cornerstone in enhancing global food security and sustainable agriculture.