

Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem

Faculty of Environment

PRACTICAL MEASUREMENTS OF PLANT PHYSIOLOGY

Mgr. Hana Auer Malinská, Ph.D.



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Practical part of the course:

Basic methods for measurement of plant physiology parameters:

1. Measurement of biomass
2. Measurement of leaf surface
3. Leaf fluorescence
4. Plant pigment reflectance
5. Evolution of oxygen, sequestration of carbon dioxide
6. Complex methods for phenotyping-multispectral camera

These methods will be presented in accordance with practical focus of the thesis.

1. Basic Techniques:

1.1 Measurement of Photosynthesis

Principle:

Chlorophyll fluorescence is an emission of light that occurs when chlorophyll molecules, after absorbing photons, return from an excited state to their ground state. This fluorescence provides direct insight into the photosystem II (PSII) activity within the chloroplasts and can be used to gauge the efficiency and health of the photosynthetic process.

Methods:

- **Chlorophyll Fluorescence:**
 - **Description:** As a non-invasive technique, chlorophyll fluorescence allows probing of the efficiency of the PSII in plants. Changes in fluorescence can provide information about various processes and potential stressors affecting the plant.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Dark-adapt the leaf (to ensure all PSII reaction centers are open). Place leaf clip on the leaf (15 min. minimum).
 2. Expose the leaf to a brief saturating light pulse to induce maximum fluorescence-start the machine.
 3. Measure the fluorescence emitted during this light pulse and the afterglow.
 4. Analyze the data to determine various parameters like the maximum quantum yield of PSII.
 - **Equipment:** Pulse-Amplitude Modulated (PAM) fluorometer.

Applications:

- **Stress Response:** Changes in chlorophyll fluorescence can indicate plant stress before other symptoms (like wilting or color change) become visible. Whether it's due to drought, extreme temperatures, or nutrient deficiencies, plants undergoing stress will often show altered fluorescence patterns.
- **Developmental Stages:** Different stages of plant growth, such as vegetative vs. reproductive, might have different photosynthetic efficiencies. By measuring chlorophyll fluorescence, researchers can track how photosynthetic efficiency changes throughout the life of the plant.
- **Screening for High Photosynthetic Efficiency:** In breeding programs, chlorophyll fluorescence can be used to screen for plant varieties that have higher photosynthetic efficiencies – a trait that could lead to higher yields in crops.
- **Environmental and Climate Studies:** By understanding photosynthesis rates and efficiencies in different environments or under different CO₂ levels, scientists can predict how plants will respond to changing climates and manage ecosystems more effectively.

1.2 Measurement of Leaf Surface

Principle:

The leaf surface area is a crucial parameter in plant physiology as it directly influences the photosynthetic capacity, transpiration, and overall gas exchange. The accurate measurement of leaf surface area allows researchers to understand plant-environment interactions, particularly under varying environmental stressors.

Methods:

- **Digital Imaging:**
 - **Description:** One of the most common methods to determine leaf surface area is to take a digital image of the leaf and use software to calculate its area.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Flatten the leaf on a contrasting background (e.g., white paper).
 2. Include a known size reference (e.g., ruler) in the image for calibration.
 3. Capture the image using a digital camera or scanner.
 4. Analyze the image using software (e.g., ImageJ) to calculate leaf area.
 - **Equipment:** Digital camera or scanner, software for image analysis (like ImageJ).
- **Leaf Area Meter:**
 - **Description:** A device specifically designed to measure leaf area by scanning the leaf or detecting its dimensions.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Insert the leaf into the meter's reading area.

2. The device will automatically detect the leaf's boundaries and calculate its area.

- **Equipment:** Commercial leaf area meters (e.g., LI-3100C Area Meter by LI-COR).

Applications:

- Growth Monitoring:
- Tracking changes in leaf surface area can help in monitoring plant growth and developmental stages.
- Stress Response:
- Reduced leaf expansion and growth can be indicators of stress conditions such as drought, salinity, or nutrient deficiencies.
- Physiological Studies:
- Leaf surface area plays a pivotal role in gas exchange. Understanding variations in leaf surface can help in studies related to photosynthesis, respiration, and transpiration.
- Ecological and Environmental Studies:
- In ecosystem modeling and climate studies, leaf area index (LAI), which is derived from individual leaf surface areas, is used to understand canopy structure and its interaction with the environment.

1.3 Measurement of Biomass

Principle:

Plant biomass, a measure of the weight of plant tissue (typically dry weight), is a vital parameter for understanding plant growth, productivity, and resource allocation. Biomass provides insights into the energy stored in plants and can be used as an indicator of overall plant health and vigor.

Methods:

- **Destructive Sampling:**
 - **Description:** Involves physically harvesting and weighing plant material. This method provides accurate biomass measurements but sacrifices the sampled plants.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Harvest the desired plant parts (e.g., leaves, stems, roots).
 2. Oven-dry the samples to a constant weight (removing all moisture).
 3. Weigh the dry samples using a precision balance.
 - **Equipment:** Oven, precision balance.
- **Non-destructive Estimation:**
 - **Description:** Estimations of biomass are made based on measurements of other plant parameters (e.g., height, canopy diameter, leaf area) that correlate with biomass.

- **Procedure:**
 1. Measure specific plant parameters (e.g., height).
 2. Use pre-established regression equations or relationships to estimate biomass from the measured parameters.
- **Equipment:** Measuring tape or ruler, established regression equations or charts.

Applications:

- **Productivity Analysis:**
 - Estimating the productivity of an ecosystem or crop by measuring the amount of biomass produced over a specific period.
- **Ecological Studies:**
 - Understanding trophic levels and energy transfer in ecosystems by quantifying the biomass at various trophic levels.
- **Resource Allocation Studies:**
 - Determining how plants allocate resources (like nutrients) to different tissues (e.g., leaves vs. roots) based on biomass distribution.
- **Carbon Sequestration:**
 - Biomass estimation is crucial for calculating how much carbon dioxide plants remove from the atmosphere and store as organic matter.
- **Bioenergy Production:**
 - Evaluating potential yield and energy content for plants used as biofuel sources.

1.4 Measurement of Reflectance

Principle:

Plant reflectance is the proportion of light that is reflected by plant tissues across different wavelengths. The spectral reflectance signature of plants varies based on their health, stress levels, water content, and other physiological characteristics. By measuring reflectance, especially in the visible and near-infrared regions, researchers can gain insights into various plant attributes and conditions.

Methods:

- **Spectroradiometers:**
 - **Description:** Devices that measure light reflectance across a broad range of wavelengths, giving a detailed spectral signature.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Position the spectroradiometer sensor facing the target (e.g., canopy, leaf).

2. Ensure consistent lighting conditions, either by using controlled light sources or by measuring under uniform natural light.
 3. Capture the reflectance data across the desired wavelengths.
- **Equipment:** Field or laboratory spectroradiometers (e.g., ASD FieldSpec).
 - **Multispectral Cameras:**
 - **Description:** Cameras that capture images in specific wavelength bands. Often used in aerial or drone-based studies.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Mount the multispectral camera on a drone or stand.
 2. Capture images of the target area.
 3. Post-process the images to obtain reflectance values or indices (e.g., NDVI - Normalized Difference Vegetation Index).
 - **Equipment:** Multispectral cameras.

Applications:

- **Plant Health Monitoring:**
 - Detecting diseases, pests, or nutrient deficiencies that can alter the reflectance signature of plant tissues.
- **Stress Detection:**
 - Identifying environmental stresses (e.g., drought, salinity) affecting plants, which can be detected early through changes in spectral reflectance.
- **Water Content Estimation:**
 - Reflectance in the near-infrared range is influenced by water content in plant tissues, enabling estimates of plant hydration levels.
- **Crop Monitoring:**
 - Large-scale assessment of crop health, maturity stages, and potential yield through aerial multispectral imaging.
- **Ecological Studies:**
 - Monitoring vegetation changes, successional stages, and biodiversity in natural ecosystems using reflectance data.

1.5 Measurement of O₂ and CO₂

Principle:

The measurement of oxygen (O₂) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations is fundamental in understanding plant respiration and photosynthesis. The exchange of these gases offers insights into metabolic activities, stress responses, and overall physiological status of the plant.

Methods:

- **Gas Exchange Systems:**
 - **Description:** Devices that measure the inflow and outflow of gases from plant tissues, primarily leaves.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Enclose the leaf or plant part in a chamber.
 2. Monitor the concentration of O₂ and CO₂ in the chamber over time.
 3. Calculate rates of photosynthesis and respiration based on changes in gas concentrations.
 - **Equipment:** Portable gas exchange systems (e.g., LI-6400XT Portable Photosynthesis System by LI-COR).
- **Infrared Gas Analyzers (IRGA):**
 - **Description:** Instruments that detect CO₂ and sometimes O₂ concentrations based on the absorption of infrared light.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Direct a beam of infrared light through a sample of air from the plant chamber.
 2. Measure the amount of light absorbed to determine gas concentrations.
 - **Equipment:** Infrared gas analyzers, often integrated into gas exchange systems.

Applications:

- **Photosynthesis and Respiration Studies:**
 - Determining rates of photosynthesis and respiration in different environmental conditions or developmental stages.
- **Stress Physiology:**
 - Evaluating the impact of abiotic stresses (like drought, temperature extremes) on plant metabolic activities by analyzing gas exchange patterns.
- **Growth Chambers and Controlled Environments:**
 - Monitoring and controlling gas concentrations to create specific environments for plant growth experiments.
- **Ecophysiology:**
 - Studying adaptations of plants to their natural habitats, understanding how different species optimize gas exchange under varying conditions.
- **Carbon Sequestration:**
 - Estimating the amount of carbon fixed by plants and the potential for carbon storage in different ecosystems.

2. Advanced Techniques - Imaging and Phenotyping

2.1 Microscopy Techniques

Principle:

Microscopy techniques are employed to visualize cellular and subcellular structures in plant tissues, offering an in-depth understanding of plant physiology and pathology. The choice of microscopy method depends on the level of resolution needed and the specific structures being investigated.

Methods:

- **Light Microscopy:**
 - **Description:** Employs visible light to magnify and visualize plant tissues and cells.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Prepare slides of plant tissues.
 2. Stain the sample if needed for better contrast.
 3. Observe under the light microscope.
 - **Equipment:** Light microscope, staining reagents.
- **Fluorescence Microscopy:**
 - **Description:** Utilizes high-resolution imaging of plant structures, often down to the organel level.
 - **Procedure:**
 1. Prepare ultra-thin sections of plant tissues.
 2. Immerse in fluorescence dye.
 3. Observe under the fluorescence microscope.
 - **Equipment:** Fluorescence microscope, slides, fluorescence dye

Applications:

- **Cell Biology:**
 - Studying cellular organelles, cell wall structure, and other cellular features to understand plant physiology and responses to various stimuli.
- **Pathology Studies:**
 - Investigating plant diseases at the cellular level, including host-pathogen interactions and disease mechanisms.
- **Developmental Biology:**
 - Visualizing stages of cell division, differentiation, and tissue development.
- **Tissue Studies:**

- Investigating the arrangement and specialization of cells in different types of plant tissues (e.g., vascular, epidermal).
- **Molecular Localization:**
 - High-resolution microscopy can be employed to locate specific molecules or complexes within cells, aiding in molecular biology studies.

2.2. Remote Sensing and Phenotyping

Principle

Remote sensing involves obtaining information about objects without direct contact, often using sensors mounted on platforms like satellites, aircraft, or drones. In the context of plant physiology, remote sensing allows researchers to rapidly collect data on plant traits across large areas. Phenotyping, the measurement of these traits, is vital in studies ranging from genetics to ecology.

Applications:

- **High-throughput Phenotyping:**
 - Rapidly assessing traits of numerous plants, invaluable in breeding programs and genetic studies.
- **Stress Detection:**
 - Identifying plant water stress, diseases, or other environmental stresses through changes in reflectance or temperature patterns.
- **Yield Prediction:**
 - Using phenotypic traits and patterns derived from remote sensing to predict crop yields.
- **Irrigation Management:**
 - Thermal imaging can detect plant water stress, guiding precision irrigation efforts.
- **Large-scale Ecological Studies:**
 - Monitoring changes in vegetation cover, biodiversity, or successional stages in ecosystems.
- **Disease and Pest Monitoring:**
 - Early detection of disease or pest infestations based on changes in plant reflectance or appearance.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Principle:

After collecting data through various physiological measurements, these data sets need to be statistically analyzed and interpreted. This process helps transform raw data into meaningful insights, allowing researchers to draw robust conclusions, identify patterns, and make predictions.

Methods:

- Basic Statistics:
 - Description: Fundamental statistical tools to summarize and describe data.
 - Procedure:
 1. Compute measures of central tendency (mean, median).
 2. Calculate measures of dispersion (standard deviation, variance).
 3. Generate graphical representations (histograms, scatter plots).
 - Tools: Excel, R, SPSS.
- Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):
 - Description: A statistical method to test differences between two or more means.
 - Procedure:
 1. Define null and alternative hypotheses.
 2. Use ANOVA to test if there's a significant difference between group means.
 3. If significant, post hoc tests (like Tukey's) can be performed to find out which groups differ.
 - Tools: R, SPSS, SAS.
- Regression:
 - Description: Evaluates relationships between dependent and independent variables.
 - Procedure:
 1. Determine the dependent and independent variables.
 2. Fit a regression model.
 3. Evaluate model fit and significance of predictors.
 - Tools: R, Python, Excel.
- Bioinformatics Tools:
 - Description: Software and databases specifically designed to analyze biological data.
 - Procedure:
 1. Input data into the chosen tool (e.g., sequence data, gene expression).
 2. Execute analysis (e.g., sequence alignment, pathway analysis).
 - Tools: BLAST, Gene Ontology, KEGG.

Applications:

- **Comparative Studies:**
 - Using statistical tests to compare physiological parameters across different treatments, genotypes, or conditions.
- **Pattern Recognition:**
 - Identifying patterns or trends in large datasets, especially useful in omics studies (genomics, proteomics).
- **Predictive Modelling:**
 - Using regression and other predictive models to forecast future outcomes based on current data, e.g., predicting crop yields.
- **Functional Analysis:**
 - Using bioinformatics tools to understand the function of genes, proteins, or other molecules in specific physiological contexts.
- **Genome-wide Association Studies (GWAS):**
 - Identifying genetic variants associated with specific traits or responses in plants.

4. 4. Practical Aspects and Troubleshooting

Principle:

While theory and methodology form the foundation of any experimental procedure, real-world execution often comes with its own set of challenges. Understanding the practical aspects and troubleshooting potential issues ensures smooth operation and reliable results.

Methods:

- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):**
 - **Description:** Detailed, step-by-step protocols tailored for specific experimental methods.
 - **Application:** To ensure consistency across experiments and between researchers.
- **Quality Control (QC) and Quality Assurance (QA):**
 - **Description:** Practices and procedures to ensure data quality and reliability.
 - **Application:** Implementing controls in experiments, regularly calibrating equipment, and validating methods.
- **Documentation and Lab Journals:**
 - **Description:** Keeping detailed records of experimental procedures, observations, and results.
 - **Application:** Replicating experiments, tracking potential sources of error, and ensuring research transparency.

Troubleshooting:

1. Equipment Malfunction:
 - Challenge: Equipment not working properly or providing inconsistent results.
 - Solution: Regular maintenance, calibration, and understanding equipment manuals.
2. Sample Contamination:
 - Challenge: Unwanted substances or organisms interfering with results.
 - Solution: Sterile techniques, clean workspaces, and proper sample storage.
3. Inconsistent Results:
 - Challenge: Obtaining different results for repeated experiments or between replicates.
 - Solution: Ensuring consistent sample preparation, checking for equipment issues, and reviewing experimental protocols.
4. Data Analysis Errors:
 - Challenge: Incorrect interpretations or misapplication of statistical methods.
 - Solution: Proper training in data analysis, peer reviews, and using validated software/tools.
5. Low Reproducibility:
 - Challenge: Difficulty in replicating results either within the lab or by other researchers.
 - Solution: Detailed documentation, transparency in methodology, and ensuring experimental rigor.

Applications:

- Experimental Consistency:
 - Implementing best practices ensures consistency across experiments, leading to more reliable results.
- Research Integrity:
 - Proper documentation and adherence to established protocols uphold the integrity of the research.
- Efficiency in the Lab:
 - Troubleshooting common issues helps reduce time spent on rectifying problems and increases research efficiency.

5. Future Directions in Plant Physiology Methods

With the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing understanding of plant biology, new methods and techniques continually emerge, offering more efficient, precise, and comprehensive ways to study plant physiology.

5.1. Emerging Techniques and Technologies:

- **Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning:**

Description: Using advanced algorithms and computational models to analyze and predict complex plant physiological responses.

Application: Predictive modeling for crop yields, disease resistance, and phenotypic traits based on vast datasets.

- **Nano-technology:**

Description: The application of nanomaterials and nano-tools in plant research.

Application: Enhanced delivery systems for nutrients and pesticides, sensors for real-time monitoring of plant health at the cellular level, and studying plant-microbe interactions.

- **CRISPR/Cas Systems:**

Description: A genome editing tool allowing for specific modifications to the plant genome.

Application: Modifying plant genes for desired traits, studying gene function, and creating genetically modified organisms with enhanced properties.

- **3D and 4D Imaging:**

Description: Advanced imaging techniques providing three-dimensional structural details and capturing dynamic processes over time.

Application: Visualizing plant cell organelles, tissue structures, and studying developmental processes in real-time.

- **Remote Sensing with Advanced Satellites:**

Description: Satellites equipped with more advanced sensors providing higher resolution and broader spectral range data.

Application: Large-scale monitoring of plant health, biodiversity, and agricultural productivity, with better precision and detail.

Implications and Applications:

- **Precision Agriculture:**

Tailoring agricultural practices at an almost individual plant level to optimize productivity and sustainability using advanced monitoring and analysis tools.

- **Enhanced Plant Breeding:**

Leveraging genomic tools and AI to predict and produce plants with desired traits more efficiently.

- **Sustainable Agriculture:**

Using nanotechnology and advanced sensors to reduce the use of water, fertilizers, and pesticides, leading to more sustainable farming practices.

- **Better Understanding of Plant Biology:**

Advanced imaging and genetic tools provide deeper insights into plant developmental processes, signaling pathways, and interactions with the environment.

- **Climate Change Mitigation:**

Developing and implementing strategies to produce crops that are more resilient to changing climate conditions using predictive models and genomic tools.

Supplementary Materials (will be addressed during the course)

- **Case Studies:** Real-life applications of these methods in research.
- **Videos and Tutorials:** Curate a list of online resources for hands-on techniques.
- **Practice Questions:** Design questions based on real-life scenarios to test their understanding.
- **Lab Protocols:** Detailed step-by-step procedures for each method.

Suggested Readings for each topic:

List of recommended textbooks, journal articles, and online resources for a deeper dive into each topic.

1. Basic Techniques:

1.1. Measurement of Photosynthesis:

- **Book:** "Photosynthesis: Plastid Biology, Energy Conversion and Carbon Assimilation" by Julian J. Eaton-Rye, Baishnab C. Tripathy, and Thomas D. Sharkey.
- **Online Resource:** [Khan Academy - Photosynthesis](#)

1.2. Measurement of Leaf Surface:

- **Book:** "Plant Physiological Ecology" by Hans Lambers, F Stuart Chapin III, and Thijs L. Pons.
- <https://botanika.prf.jcu.cz/suspa/vyuka/materialy/GreenBible.pdf>
- **Online Resource:** [Leaf Area Index: Measurement, Theory, and Applications](#)
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/leaf-area-index>

1.3. Measurement of biomass:

- **Online Resource:** [FAO - Guidelines for Measuring Biomass](#)
- <https://apps.worldagroforestry.org/downloads/Publications/PDFS/RP16065.pdf>

1.4. Measurement of Reflectance:

- **Book:** "Remote Sensing of Vegetation: Principles, Techniques, and Applications" by Hamlyn G. Jones and Robin A. Vaughan.

- **Online Resource:** [NASA Earth Observatory - Remote Sensing](#)

1.5. Measurement of O₂ and CO₂:

- **Book:** <https://botanika.prf.jcu.cz/suspa/vyuka/materialy/GreenBible.pdf>
- **Online Resource:** <https://naturalhistory.si.edu/education/teaching-resources/life-science/webinar-how-do-plants-breathe>

2. Advanced Techniques - Imaging and Phenotyping:

2.1. Microscopy Techniques:

- **Book:** "Plant Microtechnique and Microscopy" by Steven E. Ruzin.
- **Online Resource:** <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK26880/>

2.2. Remote Sensing and Phenotyping:

- **Book:** https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258059078_Field_high-throughput_phenotyping_The_new_crop_breeding_frontier
- **Online Resource:** [USGS - Remote Sensing Phenology](#)

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

- **Book:** "R for Data Science" by Hadley Wickham and Garrett Grolemund.
- **Online Resource:** [DataCamp - Python and R courses](#)

4. Practical Aspects and Troubleshooting:

- **Book:** "Plant Physiology and Development" by Lincoln Taiz, Eduardo Zeiger, Ian M. Møller, and Angus Murphy. This comprehensive book offers insights into various plant physiological methods and common troubleshooting techniques.

Supplementary Materials:

- **Lab Protocols:** "Plant Physiology, Fifth Edition: A Treatise: Growth and Development" by Frank B. Salisbury and Cleon W. Ross. This book contains a wealth of lab protocols and experimental methods.
- <https://botanika.prf.jcu.cz/suspa/vyuka/materialy/GreenBible.pdf>