Volume 4, Issue 5
May I 2026

Agri Roots
e- Magazine

www.agrirootsmagazine.in

ISSN: 2583-9071

Role of Growth Regulators in Horticultural Crops

ARTICLE ID: 0374

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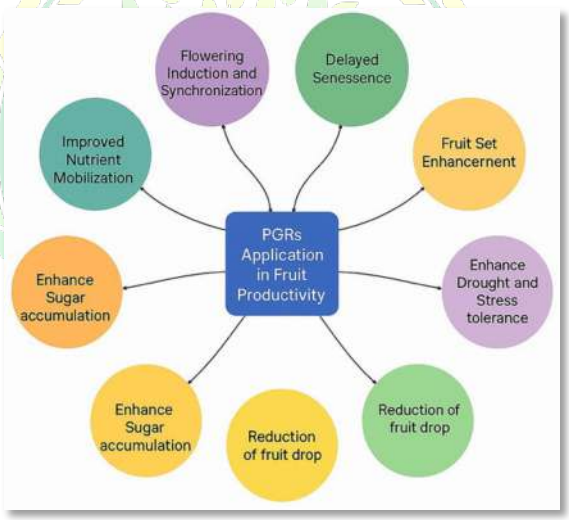
Growth regulators, also known as plant hormones, play a crucial role in the growth, development, and productivity of horticultural crops. These naturally occurring compounds or synthetic analogues influence various physiological processes, including cell division, cell elongation, flowering, fruit setting, and ripening. Proper understanding and utilization of growth regulators can significantly improve horticultural practices by enhancing crop yield, quality, and uniformity. This article discusses the major types of growth regulators, their effects on horticultural crops, and their importance in sustainable agriculture.



Types of Growth Regulators

Growth regulators are classified into different groups based on their functions and chemical nature. The major types are as follows:

1. Auxins

Auxins are essential for cell elongation and differentiation. They promote root initiation and development and are widely used in rooting powders for vegetative propagation through cuttings.

2. Gibberellins (GAs)

Gibberellins stimulate stem elongation, seed germination, and flowering. They are commonly used to induce parthenocarpy (seedless fruit formation) and improve fruit size and quality.

3. Cytokinins

Cytokinins promote cell division and delay senescence (aging) in plants. They are useful in extending the shelf life of fruits and vegetables after harvest.

4. Ethylene

Ethylene is a gaseous plant hormone responsible for fruit ripening and senescence. It is widely used for synchronized ripening and better harvest management.

5. Abscisic Acid (ABA)

Abscisic acid plays an important role in stress tolerance, especially under drought conditions. It regulates stomatal closure and helps plants reduce water loss.

Effects of Growth Regulators on Horticultural Crops

The application of growth regulators produces several beneficial effects in horticultural crops.

Auxins promote root development, improving the establishment of young plants and enhancing nutrient absorption. They are widely used in the propagation of ornamental and vegetable crops.

Gibberellins improve fruit size and quality in crops such as grapes and citrus. They are also used to induce flowering in crops like pineapple, ensuring synchronized harvesting.

Cytokinins help maintain post-harvest quality by delaying senescence, thereby increasing the storage life and market value of fruits and vegetables.

Ethylene management is particularly important in climacteric fruits such as banana, tomato, and apple. Controlled ethylene application helps regulate ripening and ensures fruits reach consumers at optimum quality.

ABA improves drought tolerance by reducing water loss through stomatal regulation, thereby increasing plant resilience under water-stressed conditions.

Role of Technology in Applying Growth Regulators

Advancements in agricultural technology have improved the application and monitoring of growth regulators in horticulture.

Tissue Culture

Tissue culture techniques allow precise application of growth regulators during plant propagation. Optimized hormone concentrations help in producing healthy and uniform planting material.

Precision Agriculture

Precision agriculture tools such as soil moisture sensors and weather-monitoring systems assist in determining the ideal timing and dosage of growth regulator application. This improves efficiency and reduces environmental impact.

Remote Sensing

Remote sensing technologies, including drones and imaging sensors, help monitor plant health and crop responses in real time. Such data support informed decision-making regarding growth regulator management.

Challenges in the Use of Growth Regulators

Despite their advantages, the use of growth regulators presents several challenges.

One major issue is overdosing, which may result in abnormal growth, poor quality, or phytotoxicity. Therefore, proper knowledge regarding application rates and methods is essential.

Crop responses to growth regulators vary depending on species, environmental conditions, and growth stages. This variability makes it difficult to develop universal recommendations.

Regulatory restrictions regarding the use of growth regulators differ among countries, requiring growers to comply with safety standards and agricultural regulations.

In recent years, there has also been growing interest in organic and eco-friendly alternatives to synthetic growth regulators. Research on natural biostimulants and plant-based growth promoters is increasing to ensure environmental sustainability.

Impact on the Horticultural Sector

Growth regulators have significantly contributed to increased productivity, quality, and sustainability in horticulture. By controlling plant growth and development, they help produce high-quality fruits and vegetables that meet market demands.

For example, gibberellin application in grape cultivation improves berry size, uniformity, and market value. Similarly, cytokinins reduce post-harvest losses by extending shelf life.

Growth regulators also promote uniformity in crop production, which is essential in commercial horticulture. Consistency in fruit size, colour, flavour, and ripening improves marketability and reduces wastage.

Moreover, these regulators support sustainable farming practices by improving crop tolerance to environmental stresses, thereby reducing dependence on excessive chemical inputs.

Impact on the Economy

The use of growth regulators positively influences the economy by improving agricultural productivity and profitability. Higher yields and better-quality produce increase farmers' income and contribute to rural development.

Enhanced horticultural production also supports export opportunities, contributing to national economic growth. Increased demand for fresh fruits and vegetables creates employment in farming, packaging, transportation, and marketing sectors.

As the global population continues to rise, growth regulators can help meet the increasing food demand sustainably while maintaining environmental balance.

Additionally, research and innovation in growth regulator technology encourage investment in modern agriculture, fostering collaboration among scientists, agronomists, and farmers.

Conclusion

Growth regulators are essential tools in modern horticulture, significantly influencing plant growth, yield, quality, and stress tolerance. Their proper use improves productivity, profitability, and sustainability in horticultural crop production. Technological advancements and ongoing research continue to enhance their effectiveness and environmental safety. In the future, growth regulators will play an increasingly important role in ensuring food security and sustainable agricultural development.

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