

Full Length Research Paper

Determination of the vegetative and reproductive characteristics of valerian (*Valeriana officinalis* L.) under sowing dates and planting densities at Iran

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Accepted 18 August, 2009

This study was conducted as split-plot field experiment in a randomized complete block design with four replications for one year planting. The main factors were the sowing dates (10th August, 1st September and 20th September) and sub factors were the planting densities (4, 8 and 12 plants/m²). The results showed that sowing date and planting density significantly affected grain yield, essential oil yield, essential oil percentage, root length, root diameter, flowering stem number and root yield. Means comparison showed that the highest grain yield and root yield were achieved under the 8 plants/m² planting density and 10th August sowing date, the highest root length and flowering stem number were achieved under 12 plants/m² planting density and 10th August sowing date, the highest root diameter was achieved under 4 plants/m² planting density and 10th August sowing date, the highest essential oil yield was achieved under 8 plants/m² planting density and 20th September sowing date and the highest essential oil percentage was achieved under 4 plants/m² planting density and 20th September sowing date. It was thus concluded that sowing date and planting density are the main factors influencing the quantity and quality characteristics of valerian. Our finding may give applicable advice to commercial farmers and agricultural researches for management and concern on planting density strategy and estimate of sowing date carefully for increase of quantity and quality characteristics in medicinal and aromatic plants farming and is better that such studies may be validated further by conducting for two or more years.

Key words: Sowing date, planting density, essential oil, *Valerian*.

INTRODUCTION

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*, Valerianaceae) is a hardy perennial flowering plant, with heads of sweetly scented pink or white flowers. The flowers are in bloom in the northern hemisphere from June - September. Valerian was used as a perfume in the sixteenth century. Natural habitat of the plant is Europe and parts of Asia. Valerian has been introduced into North America. Valerian, in pharmacology and phytotherapeutic medicine, is the name

of an herb or dietary supplement prepared from roots of the plant. Valerian is a well-known and frequently used medicinal herb that has a long and proven history of efficacy. It is noted especially for its effect as a tranquilliser or sedatives and nervine, particularly for those people suffering from nervous overstrain (Grieve, 1984; Foster and Duke, 1990). It is used in perfumes to provide a 'mossy' aroma (Usher, 1974; Bown, 1995), though the scent is considered to be offensive to many people (Coffey, 1993). Valerian has been shown to encourage sleep, improve sleep quality and reduce blood pressure (Chevallier, 1996). It is also used internally in

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Table 1. Some physical and chemical characteristics of the experimental soil.

Soil texture	Sand (%)	Silt (%)	Clay (%)	K mg/kg	P mg/kg	N mg/kg	Na Ds/m	EC 1: 2.5	pH	Depth of sampling
L	46	31	22	140.2	5.2	31.7	0.03	0.18	8.0	0 - 15 cm
SC.L	58	24	18	120.3	2.7	26.2	0.02	0.14	7.8	15 - 30 cm

the treatment of painful menstruation, cramps, hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome etc (Bown, 1995; Chevallier, 1996). It should not be prescribed for patients with liver problems (Bown, 1995).

The active ingredients are called valepotriates, research has confirmed that these have a calming effect on agitated people, but are also a stimulant in cases of fatigue (Foster and Duke, 1990). The roots of 2 year old plants are harvested in the autumn once the leaves have died down and are used fresh or dried. The fresh root is about 3 times as effective as roots dried at 40° (the report does not specify if this is centigrade or Fahrenheit), whilst temperatures above 82° destroy the active principle in the root (Grieve, 1984; Launert, 1981; Bown, 1995). The plant yields about 1% of an essential oil from the roots (Chiej, 1984). To optimize yield of commercial essential oil, most growers use high planting densities with over 6 - 10 plants/m² for annual crops but not for biennial crops (Douglas et al., 1996). High plant density may increase relative humidity within the canopy and increase the duration of leaf wetness by reducing air movement and sun light penetration (Burdon and Chilvers, 1982; Tu, 1997). Thus plant density could have significant impact on plant disease incidence (Burdon and Chilvers, 1982; Copes and Scherm, 2005).

Several studies have been conducted on the effect of plant density on essential oil of medicinal plants (Ram et al., 1997; Hashemi et al., 2007; Taheri-Asghari et al., 2008; Zehtab-Salmasi et al., 2001). Douglas et al. (1996) found optimum densities of 60000 plants/ha [6 plants/m²] for highest essential oil in valerian. Moreover, most published studies evaluating the effect of plant density on valerian yield have traditionally used analysis of variance and means separation techniques to test differences among discrete levels of plant density (Staub et al., 1992; Widders and Price, 1989). The relationship between essential oil and sowing date has not been established. Early planting increases the total length of time that the plant is in the field and exposed to the environment and also it is associated with increased incidences of several diseases (Bowden, 1997). Thus, early planting increases the probability of unfavorable consequences, including the quality of the essential oil. Several studies have been conducted on the effect of sowing date on essential oil of medicinal plants (Zehtab-salmasi et al., 2001; Carrubba et al., 2006). The objectives of this study were to describe relationships between sowing date and planting density on essential oil yield and determine the optimum sowing date and planting density for valerian essential oil in Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out at the Abureyhan Campus, University of Tehran, Iran in 2005 - 2006. The field experiment was carried out in a split - plot, randomized complete block design with four replications. The main factor was sowing date (10th August, 1st September and 20th September) and the sub- factor was planting density (4, 8 and 12 plants/m²). The soil consisted of 22% clay, 31% silt and 46% sand (Table 1).

The soil bulk density was 1.21 g cm⁻³, the field was prepared in a 15 m² area (5 × 3 m) divided into a total number of 24 plots. Nitrogen fertilizer added in twice; first, 75 kg ha⁻¹ urea at the stemming stage and 75 kg ha⁻¹ urea at the flowering stage. Also 150 and 75 kg ha⁻¹ potash and phosphorus fertilizers applied at planting respectively. At the end of growth stage we collected 10 plants from each plot randomly for determination of plant characteristics and selected 100 gm root from each plot for determination of essential oil percentage by Clevenger. Finally, essential oil yield was determined by the following formula (Aliabadi Farahani et al., 2008).

$$\text{Essential oil yield} = \text{Essential oil percentage} \times \text{Root yield}$$

Data were subjected to analysis of variance (ANOVA) using Statistical Analysis System [SAS, 1988] and followed by Duncan's multiple range tests. Terms were considered significant at $P < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Final results of plants characters showed that planting density significantly increased the grain yield, essential oil yield, essential oil percentage, root yield, flowering stem number, root diameter and root length ($P \leq 0.01$, Table 2). However, we noted longest root length under the 12 plants/m² planting density [PD], while other plant characteristics were reduced under 12 plants/m² PD (Table 3). Highest grain yield, essential oil yield and root yield were achieved under 8 plants/m² PD and highest essential oil percentage, flowering stem number and root diameter were achieved under 4 plants/m² PD (Table 3). Those findings are in agreement with the observations of Azizi and Kahrizi (2008); Khazaie et al. (2008) and Corley (1973). In addition, sowing date had a significant effect on all plant characteristics ($P \leq 0.01$), but essential oil yield was not significantly affected by sowing date (Table 2). Therefore, our findings indicated a significant improved of grain yield, root yield, flowering stem number, root diameter and root length under 10th August sowing date [SD].

Also, highest essential oil yield and essential oil percentage were achieved under 20 September SD (Table 3). Those results were similar with the findings of

Table 2. Analysis of variance.

Sources of variation	df	Grain yield	Means square					
			Essential oil yield	Essential oil percentage	Root yield	Flowering stem number	Root diameter	Root length
Replication	3	27.64 *	113.55	0.007	0.37 *	0.42	0.50**	7.44
Sowing date	2	947.36 **	384.14	1.423 **	6.56 **	10.47 **	4.30**	261.58**
Error a	6	12.64	85.21	0.017	0.07	0.19	0.01	3.21
Planting density	2	234.9 **	275.06 **	1.515 **	16.9 **	30.2 **	14.48**	376.33**
Sowing date × planting density	4	15.38 *	17.9	0.027	0.089	0.33	0.01	1.16
Error b	18	3.2	10.16	0.009	0.027	0.09	0.02	3.15
CV (%)		13.06	16.10	6.92	5.72	4.79	3.64	8.17

* and **: Significant at 5 and 1% levels respectively.

Table 3. Means comparison of main treatments.

Treatments		Grain yield (kg/ha)	Essential oil yield (kg/ha)	Essential oil percentage (%)	Root yield (kg/ha)	Flowering stem number (stem/plant)	Root length (cm)	Root diameter (mm)
Sowing date	10 August	36.9 a	51.43 b	1 c	5350 a	7.11 a	26.50 a	4.32 a
	1 September	25.33 b	57.81 ab	1.32 b	4640 b	6.42 b	22.08 b	3.57 b
	20 September	19.43 c	62.71 a	1.69 a	3870 c	5.27 c	17.17 c	3.14 c
Planting density	4 plant/m ²	23.27 c	54.83 b	1.74 a	3230 b	7.93 a	16.58 c	4.73 a
	8 plant/m ²	32.2 a	62.83 a	1.2 b	5370 a	6.09 b	21.41 b	3.76 b
	12 plant/m ²	26.4 b	54.28 b	1.06 c	5350 a	4.87 c	27.75 a	2.54 c

Means within the same column and rows and factors, followed by the same letter are not significantly difference ($P < 0.05$).

Hadj Seyed Hadi et al. (2004), Zehtab-salmasi et al. (2001) and Carrubba et al. (2006). Data of interactive effect between PD and SD has been demonstrated in Table 4. Interactive effect was indicated in grain yield ($P \leq 0.01$) and other plant characteristics were not significantly affected by interactive effect (Table 4). However, highest essential oil yield was indicated in the 20th September SD with 8 plants/m² PD conditions, surprisingly, other plant characteristics were reduced under these conditions (Table 4). Highest grain yield and root yield were achieved under 10th August SD with 8 plants/m² PD conditions and highest root diameter and flowering stem number were achieved under 10th August SD with 4 plants/m² PD conditions. Also, longest root length was achieved under 10th August SD with 12 plants/m² PD conditions and highest essential oil percentage was achieved under 20th September SD with 4 plants/m² PD conditions (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The results showed that late-planting decreased quantity and quality characteristics of valerian. Selection of valerian planting date is one of the most important

management decisions for essential oil production. Planting date affects leaf-spot by avoiding unfavorable weather conditions for disease development. Late planting date was positively associated with more necrosis because of favorable weather conditions. Early planting increases the forage production potential by extending the vegetative growth period and increases the total length of time that the valerian is in the field and exposed to the environment.

In areas with limited soil moisture, planting too early can cause excessive fall growth these results in depletion of soil moisture for early spring growth. Early planting of valerian also breaks winter dormancy earlier in the spring as temperature increases and, thus, has a greater potential for late spring freeze injury. Valerian planted at an intermediate date has essential oil yield potential than late-planted valerian because of increased lateral stems, leaves, and flowering stem. Late-planted valerian also develops under different temperature and day-length, has a shortened vegetative growth period, and requires greater essential oil rate to compensate partially for reduced flowering stem development. The objective of a study was to investigate the effects of planting time and plant density on flower yield and active substance of chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla* L.). The treatments

Table 4. Means comparison of interaction.

Survey instance qualifications	Plant/m ²	Grain yield (kg/ha)	Essential oil yield (kg/ha)	Essential oil percentage (%)	Root yield (kg/ha)	Flowering stem number (stem/plant)	Root length (cm)	Root diameter (mm)
10 August	4	30.40 c	51.55 cd	1.33 c	3880 d	8.80 a	21.25 c	5.38 a
	8	43.40 a	55.35 bcd	0.9 ef	6200 a	7.22 c	26.50 b	4.38 c
	12	36.90 b	47.38 d	0.8 f	5990 a	5.32 e	31.75 a	3.23 e
1 September	4	22.70 ef	53.70 bcd	1.69 b	3190 e	8.02 b	16.50 d	4.63 b
	8	29.00 cd	63.58 ab	1.18 cd	5400 b	6.25 d	21.25 c	3.63 d
	12	24.30 de	56.15 bcd	1.06 de	5340 b	4.97 e	28.50 b	2.48 f
20 September	4	16.70 g	59.23 bc	2.2 a	2700 f	6.97 c	12 e	4.20 c
	8	23.60 def	69.58 a	1.53 b	4520 c	4.80 e	16.50 d	3.30 e
	12	18 fg	59.33 bc	1.34 c	4410 c	4.02 f	23 c	1.93 g

Means within the same column and rows and factors, followed by the same letter are not significantly difference ($P < 0.05$).

were three planting times (5, 15 and 25th March) and three plant densities (50 × 20, 50 × 30 and 50 × 40 cm). Results showed that the highest number of flower per plant, fresh flower per plant, dried flower per plant, fresh flower yield, dried flower yield, essential oil yield, chamazulene percentage and chamazulene yield were obtained from the first planting time (5th March). Also, the highest number of flower, fresh flower per plant and dried flower per plant were obtained from the lowest plant density (50 × 40 cm). The highest fresh flower yield, dried flower yield, essential oil yield and chamazulene yield were obtained from the highest plant density (50 × 20 cm). So according to the results of this investigation, the highest yield was obtained from the earliest sowing and the highest plant density (Hadj Seyed Hadi et al., 2004).

Also, the highest root yield achieves under optimal plant density (8 plants/m²), because photosynthesis increases by development of leaf area and increases essential oil content. Plant population density has important effects on vegetative and reproductive development of valerian. Valerian yield is low with low plant density because of little plasticity in leaf area per plant. Additionally, valerian plants have small capacity to develop new reproductive structures in response to an increase in available resources per plant. The plant density of red chicory (*Cichorium intybus* L. var. *foliosum* Hegi) was studied at a field in Linares, south central Chile. Four and five plants/m² was established, using a single or a double planting line/row. The distance between rows was 0.60 m. The treatments were 60000, 80000, 130000 and 170000 plants/ha. The average total fresh weight/plant, the marketable fresh weight/plant and head size were higher at the lower plant density. The total yield was higher at the treatment with 4 plants/m² and a double planting line/row.

The highest marketable and export quality yield was obtained with the treatment 4 plants/m, single planting line/row. The lowest marketable yield was observed in the highest plant density treatment. The critical plant

density was 0.2 m with a single row (Carrasco et al., 1998). High plant density increased essential oil content of sweet annie (Ram et al., 1997) and cumin (Hashemi et al., 2008). On the other hand, if plant density is too high, the decrease in the availability of resources per plant in the period of flowering stem production, this may lead to a marked fall in yield per plant that is not offset by the increase in the number of plants. High plant density may increase relative humidity within the canopy and increase the duration of leaf wetness by reducing air movement and sun light penetration. The plant increased its shoot for increase of assimilation matters by increase of refugence absorb for compensation of low density in this condition. Therefore was increased root length under planting density of 12 plants/m².

Two experiments were conducted in Southern Italy with two cultivars of chicory such as 'Cicoria da foglie' (leaf chicory) and "Cicoria di Galatina" ("asparagus chicory") grown at three plant densities (11.1, 5.6 and 3.7 plants/m²). At maturity, the aerial part of the plant was excised or not. With the closest spacing during the second year a high seed yield, stems per plant and germination percentage were noticed. Leaving the plants in situ resulted in a faster germination, while the excised plants showed a decrease in seed yield, seed per plant, 1000 seed weight, plant height and number of stems per plant (Bianco et al., 1994). Also flowering stem number was increased under low density because flower reproductive cells increased in this condition by low rivalry between plants. The plant increases its root length for increase of water absorb under high density by high rivalry between plants, but root diameter increases under low density because be assimilation matters enough for increase of root diameter. Thus plant density could have significant impact on plant disease incidence.

Conclusion

The investigation showed that planting density and

sowing date significantly influence most of the productive characteristics of valerian. The best combination of planting density and sowing date for achieving high biological yield of valerian was 8 plants/m² and 20 September sowing date while the highest essential oil percentage was achieved under a density of 4 plants/m² and 20th September sowing. Practically, findings may suggest farmers and agricultural researches to consider carefully on estimate of sowing date in different planting density conditions as current challenge of scientist in global changes. As the results of a year study for the field experiments are not so reliable in view of climatic change. Thus, is better that such studies may be validated further by conducting for two or more years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Dr. Allahdadi and Dr. Irannejad for their field assistance and analytical support in processing the plant samples and collecting the data reported herein.

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