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Transient physiological responses of planting frozen root plugs of Douglas-fir seedlings

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Abstract: Short-term physiological responses of planting frozen (FR) and rapidly thawed (TR) root plugs of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Mirb.) Franco) seedlings were examined through time series (0 h, 6 h, 12 h, 1 day, 3 days, and 7 days) measurements in two separate experiments: 10 °C day : 6 °C night, RH 75% and 30 °C day : 20 °C night, RH 50%, respectively. Net photosynthesis, transpiration, shoot water potential, and root hydraulic conductance were lower in FR compared with TR seedlings under both growing conditions. Magnitude of difference in root hydraulic conductance was higher under warm-dry conditions. Chlorophyll fluorescence (F_v/F_m) values were higher for TR than FR seedlings at 0 h, but similar thereafter for both growing conditions. Needle electrolyte leakage and chlorophyll content did not differ between FR and TR seedlings under both environmental regimes. Higher root O₂ uptake was observed in FR seedlings in warm-dry conditions and in TR seedlings under cool-moist conditions. TR seedlings planted under warm-dry conditions had more flushed buds and new roots than FR seedlings, while no buds flushed for both FR and TR seedlings under cool-moist conditions. Comparatively higher photosynthetic rates in TR seedlings planted under warm-dry conditions likely contributed toward more new roots, which could be advantageous for survival and early growth.

Résumé : Les réactions physiologiques de deux traitements de motte radicaire (gelée (FR) ou décongelée (TR)) sur les semis de douglas vert (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Mirb.) Franco) ont été étudiées en fonction du temps (0 h, 6 h, 12 h, 1 jour, 3 jours et 7 jours) et de deux conditions de croissances : froides et humides (10 °C jour : 6 °C nuit, taux d'humidité relative de 75 %) ou chaudes et sèches (30 °C jour : 20 °C nuit, taux d'humidité relative de 50 %). Les auteurs ont observé un taux de photosynthèse nette, un taux de transpiration, un potentiel hydrique des pousses et une conductance hydraulique des racines plus faibles avec les semis FR par rapport aux semis TR et ce pour les deux conditions de croissance. La différence de conductance hydraulique des racines était plus marquée dans les conditions de croissance chaudes et sèches. Les mesures de fluorescence de la chlorophylle (F_v/F_m) étaient plus élevées pour les semis TR par rapport aux semis FR à 0 h, ensuite les valeurs étaient similaires pour les deux conditions de croissance. La libération d'électrolytes des aiguilles et le contenu en chlorophylle n'ont pas été affectés par les traitements et les conditions de croissance. Le taux d'accumulation d'oxygène des racines était plus élevé pour les semis FR dans les conditions chaudes et sèches ainsi que pour les semis TR dans les conditions froides et humides. Les semis TR dans les conditions chaudes et sèches ont développé plus de bourgeons et de nouvelles racines par rapport aux semis FR. Dans les conditions de croissance froides et humides, aucun bourgeon ne s'est développé pour les deux traitements de mottes radicales. Le taux relatif plus élevé de photosynthèse des semis TR dans les conditions chaudes et sèches a possiblement contribué au développement de nouvelles racines, ce qui pourrait être avantageux pour la survie et la croissance à court terme des semis de douglas vert.

[Traduit par la Rédaction]

Introduction

In temperate climates, conifer seedling production often involves freezer storage of dormant seedlings at temperatures ranging from -1 °C to -5 °C prior to spring planting (McKay 1997; Paterson et al. 2001). Frozen storage reduces

problems associated with storage mold (Ritchie 2004) and provides flexibility in scheduling seedling delivery to planting sites in spring (Rose and Haase 1997). During frozen storage, root plugs usually freeze and attach to adjacent seedlings, requiring thawing prior to outplanting to facilitate seedling separation (Kooistra 2004). Additional nursery resources needed to completely thaw root plugs, along with potential negative impacts of thawing on seedling health and physiology (Hocking 1971; Puttonen 1986), suggests that direct planting of frozen root plugs after removal from storage would streamline the seedling production process and improve logistics of seedling delivery (Kooistra and Bakker 2002).

Several studies have reported that planting of frozen seedlings had no detrimental effects on seedling performance compared with thawed seedlings (Silim and Guy 1998; Kooistra and Bakker 2005). Camm et al. (1995) showed that thawing of frozen root plugs is unnecessary when seedlings are planted into warm soil (i.e., 18–32 °C). However, there are reports suggesting higher mortality and reduced

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