



Drought Stress Tolerance in Plants: Mechanisms and Strategies for Resilience

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Citation: Mei LC (2025) Drought Stress Tolerance in Plants: Mechanisms and Strategies for Resilience. J Plant Physiol Pathol 13: 395

Received: 01-May-2025, Manuscript No. jppp-26-183728; **Editor assigned:** 4-May-2025, Pre-QC No. jppp-26-183728 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 17-May-2025, QC No. jppp-26-183728; **Revised:** 24-May-2025, Manuscript No. jppp-26-183728 (R); **Published:** 31-May-2025, DOI: 10.4172/2329-955X.1000395

Introduction

Drought is one of the most severe abiotic stresses affecting agriculture, leading to reduced crop yields, soil degradation, and threats to global food security. As climate change intensifies, the frequency and severity of water scarcity events are increasing, making drought tolerance a critical trait for sustainable agriculture. Plants have evolved a range of physiological, biochemical, and molecular mechanisms to cope with water deficit. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for developing drought-resilient crops through breeding, genetic engineering, and agronomic practices [1,2].

Discussion

Drought stress tolerance involves multiple strategies that enable plants to survive and maintain productivity under water-limited conditions. At the physiological level, plants adjust their water relations through stomatal regulation, root architecture modification, and osmotic adjustment. Stomatal closure reduces water loss via transpiration, while deeper or more extensive root systems allow access to residual soil moisture. Accumulation of osmolytes, such as proline, sugars, and glycine betaine, helps maintain cell turgor and protect cellular structures during dehydration [3,4].

Biochemical and molecular mechanisms are equally critical. Drought induces the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS), which can damage proteins, lipids, and DNA. Plants activate antioxidant enzymes, including superoxide dismutase, catalase, and

peroxidases, to mitigate oxidative damage. Stress-responsive genes are regulated by signaling molecules such as abscisic acid (ABA), which orchestrates gene expression for osmolyte synthesis, antioxidant activity, and protective protein production. Transcription factors like DREB and NAC play key roles in controlling drought-responsive genes, enabling adaptive responses [5].

Plant-microbe interactions also contribute to drought tolerance. Beneficial rhizobacteria and mycorrhizal fungi enhance water and nutrient uptake, stimulate root growth, and modulate stress-related hormone levels. These symbiotic relationships can significantly improve plant resilience under prolonged drought conditions.

In addition to natural mechanisms, agricultural strategies such as drought-tolerant crop breeding, genetic modification, and precision irrigation can enhance crop survival and yield under water deficit. Advances in genomics, transcriptomics, and phenotyping allow researchers to identify key genes and regulatory networks associated with drought tolerance, accelerating the development of resilient cultivars.

Conclusion

Drought stress tolerance is a complex trait involving physiological, biochemical, and molecular adaptations that enable plants to survive water scarcity. By understanding these mechanisms and integrating them with modern breeding and management strategies, it is possible to develop crops that maintain productivity under drought conditions. Enhancing drought resilience is crucial for sustainable agriculture, food security, and adapting to the challenges posed by a changing climate.

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