



World News of Natural Sciences

An International Scientific Journal

WNOFNS 22 (2019) 151-158

EISSN 2543-5426

Improvement of postharvest quality of cut amaranth (*Amaranthus tricolor* L.) foliage by ethanol

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ABSTRACT

The response of cut *Amaranthus tricolor* foliage to continuous treatment with 200 mg·L⁻¹ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-HQC) or 2, 4 and 6% ethanol was investigated. Application of ethanol and HQC enhanced the vase-life and final fresh weight. The best quality cut *Amaranthus tricolor* foliage were obtained when the stems were held in 4% ethanol. These are the first published results which indicate that ethanol positively improved the postharvest quality of cut *Amaranthus tricolor* foliage.

Keywords: post-harvest longevity, vase solution, *Amaranthus gangeticus*, *Amaranthus tricolor*, 8-HQC

1. INTRODUCTION

The largest genus, *Amaranthus*, contains about 70 species, and several are cultivated as ornamental plants. *Amaranthus tricolor*, known as edible amaranth, joseph's coat, tampala or Chinese spinach, is a very attractive plant with red, yellow and green foliage [1]. It is an upright, bushy annual that typically grows to 100-120 cm tall. *Amaranthus tricolor* can be successfully cultivated in flowerbeds in gardens. However, there is a lack of information of the postharvest of cut *Amaranthus tricolor* foliage.

Several substances have been applied to prolong vase life of the cut stems [2, 3]. 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-Hydroxy-2-quinolinecarboxylic acid; 8-HQC) is commonly used as floral preservatives. Ethanol is known as one of the most efficient chemical factors for extending the vase life of some cut species [4-6] by inhibiting ethylene biosynthesis [7-9].

However, limited information is available for cut foliage regarding effects of ethanol. Therefore, the present studies were conducted to determine the effect of ethanol on cut *Amaranthus tricolor* foliage.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cut stems of *Amaranthus tricolor* 'Red' and 'Burgundy' were grown in unheated high plastic tunnel covered with a double layer of plastic, using standard commercial procedures (**Fig. 1**). All experiments were conducted at the West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin (53°25' N, 14°32' E; 25 m a.s.l.).



Figure 1. Cut *Amaranthus tricolor* stems were harvested at the vegetative stage.

Stems of *Amaranthus tricolor* 'Red' and 'Burgundy' were cut randomly at 8:00-11:00 h to a length of 40 cm and taken immediately to the laboratory within 30 minutes of harvest. After recording the initial fresh weight using an electronic scale electronic (RADWAG PS 200/2000. R2 with an accuracy of 0.001 g) stems were placed into individual glass vases filled with 500 ml water (control), solution with 200 mg·l⁻¹ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate C₁₅H₁₅NO₈ (8-HQC) (Merck) or solution with 2, 4 and 6% (v/v) ethanol (Chempur, Poland). Solutions used in study were prepared using tap water in which mean ion concentration (mg·dm⁻³) was as follows: 1.50 N-NO₃, 1.3 P, 6.3 K, 94.7 Ca, 15.5, Mg, 22.0 Na, 22.0 Cl, 0.62 Cu, 0.41 Zn, 1.2 Fe, 196 HCO₃, and 0.65 mS·cm⁻¹ electrical conductivity.

Each treatment involved 10 replications per 1 stem. Solutions were not renewed during the trial. The cut *Amaranthus tricolor* 'Red' and 'Burgundy' foliage were kept in a room with controlled environment (21 ± 2 °C, 60-70 % humidity RH, $12 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ light intensity) under a daily light for $12 \text{ h}\cdot\text{d}^{-1}$. The foliage was observed every day during vase period. Vase life was expressed in days. On the day when the decorative value of the foliage was lost, their fresh weight, leaf greenness index (SPAD) and stomatal conductance were assessed. SPAD was measured with an optical device Chlorophyll Meter SPAD 502 (Minolta, Japan) and stomatal conductance was assessed with SC1 porometer (Dekagon Devices, USA).

Porometer effectively measures resistance between the leaf and the first humidity sensor and the first and second sensors.

Results were statistically verified using the analysis of variance model using Statistica 13.0 software, and the obtained means were grouped using Tukey's test at the significance level $p \leq 0.05$.

3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

All ethanol treatments significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) markedly extended vase life of cut *Amaranthus tricolor* 'Red' (**Fig. 2**) and 'Burgundy' (**Fig. 3**) foliage compared to the control (tap water). The longest vase-life were obtained with cut stems placed in 4% ethanol. Stems placed in 8-HQC also had longer vase-life compared to tap water (**Fig. 4**). Recent study has also established the effectiveness of ethanol for vase life extension of cut carnation [9-11], roses [12], chrysanthemum [13, 14], *Tweedia caerulea* [15], *Anthurium andreaeanum* [16] and *Protea* sp. [17]. The improvement in vase life in solution containing ethanol might be due to the fact that ethanol probably protecting cut foliage against water deficit stress and ethylene action [9, 12, 15].



Figure 2. Visible effect of $200 \text{ mg}\cdot\text{L}^{-1}$ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-HQC) or ethanol on the display quality of cut *Amaranthus tricolor* 'Red' foliage after 48 h of storage. Left to right: nontreated control (tap water), 8-HQC, 2, 4, and 8% ethanol.



Figure 3. Visible effect of $200 \text{ mg} \cdot \text{L}^{-1}$ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-HQC) or ethanol on the display quality of cut *Amaranthus tricolor* ‘Burgundy’ foliage after 48 h of storage. Left to right: nontreated control (tap water), 8-HQC, 2, 4, and 8% ethanol.

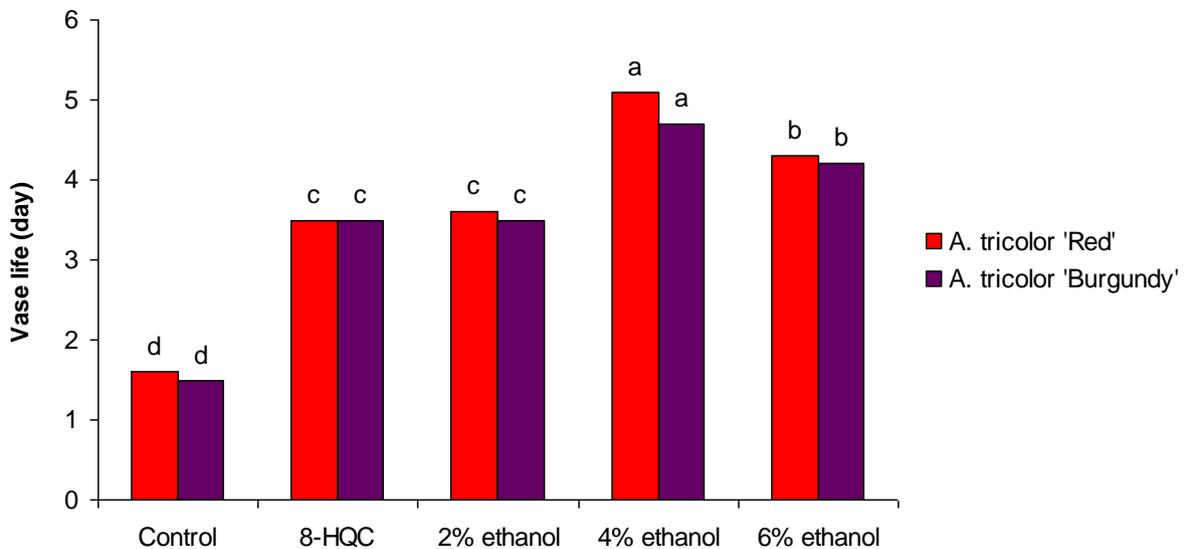


Figure 4. Effects of $200 \text{ mg} \cdot \text{L}^{-1}$ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-HQC) or ethanol (2, 4 and 8%) on the vase life of cut amaranth (*Amaranthus tricolor*) ‘Red’ and ‘Burgundy’ foliage. A different letters above each bar indicate a significant difference between treatments at $p \leq 0.05$. Values are means ($n = 10$).

During the vase life evaluation period, the change in fresh weight of cut amaranth foliage was the highest in the control. The 6% ethanol treatment best maintained relative fresh weight of cut amaranth ‘Red’ foliage (**Fig. 5**).

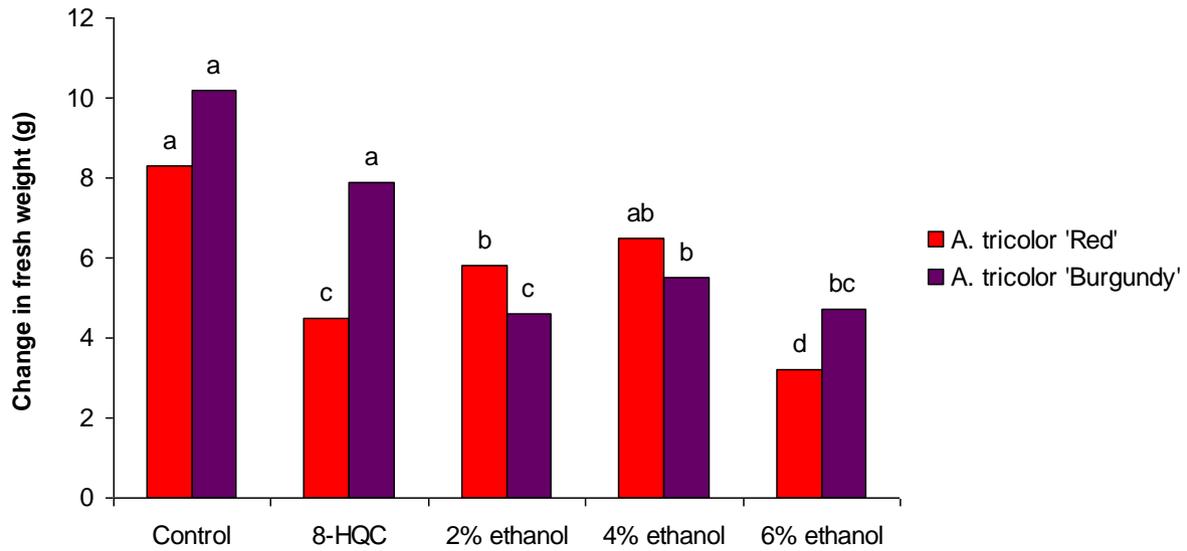


Figure 5. Effects of $200 \text{ mg} \cdot \text{L}^{-1}$ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-HQC) or ethanol (2, 4 and 8%) on the change in fresh weight (initial FW – final FW) of cut amaranth (*Amaranthus tricolor*) ‘Red’ and ‘Burgundy’ foliage. A different letters above each bar indicate a significant difference between treatments at $p \leq 0.05$. Values are means (n = 10).

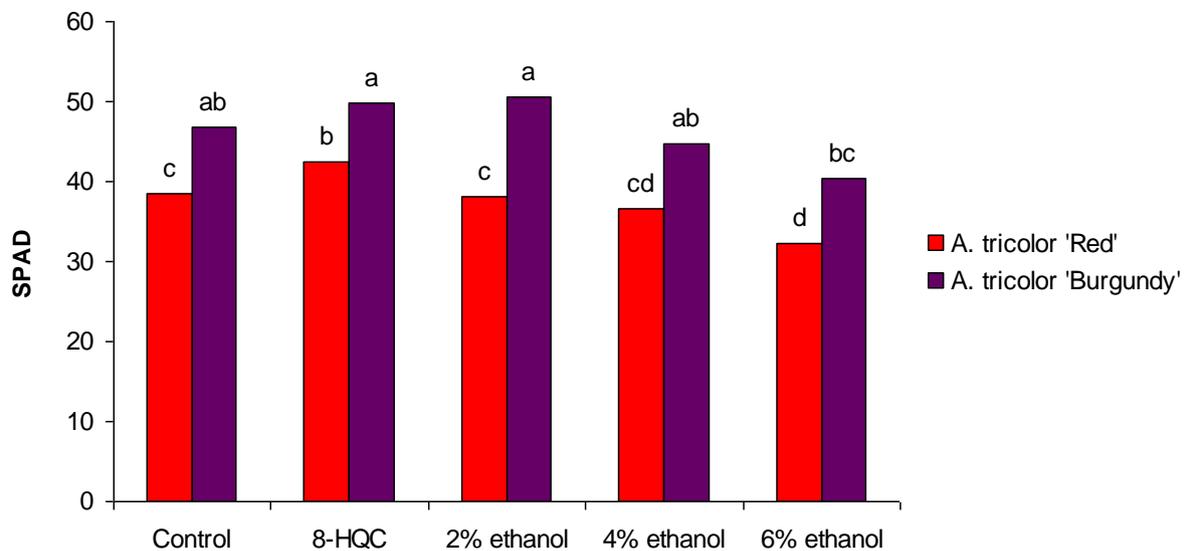


Figure 6. Effects of $200 \text{ mg} \cdot \text{L}^{-1}$ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-HQC) or ethanol (2, 4 and 8%) on the relative leaf chlorophyll concentration (SPAD value) of cut amaranth (*Amaranthus tricolor*) ‘Red’ and ‘Burgundy’ foliage. A different letters above each bar indicate a significant difference between treatments at $p \leq 0.05$. Values are means (n = 10).

Results showed a significant effect of different preservative solution on relative leaf chlorophyll concentration (SPAD). Relative leaf chlorophyll of cut amaranth (*Amaranthus tricolor*) ‘Red’ and ‘Burgundy’ foliage was significantly decreased by addition of 6 % ethanol. Only stems held in 200 mg·l⁻¹ 8-hydroxyquinoline citrate (8-HQC) had more relative leaf chlorophyll concentration (SPAD) than controls (**Fig. 6**).

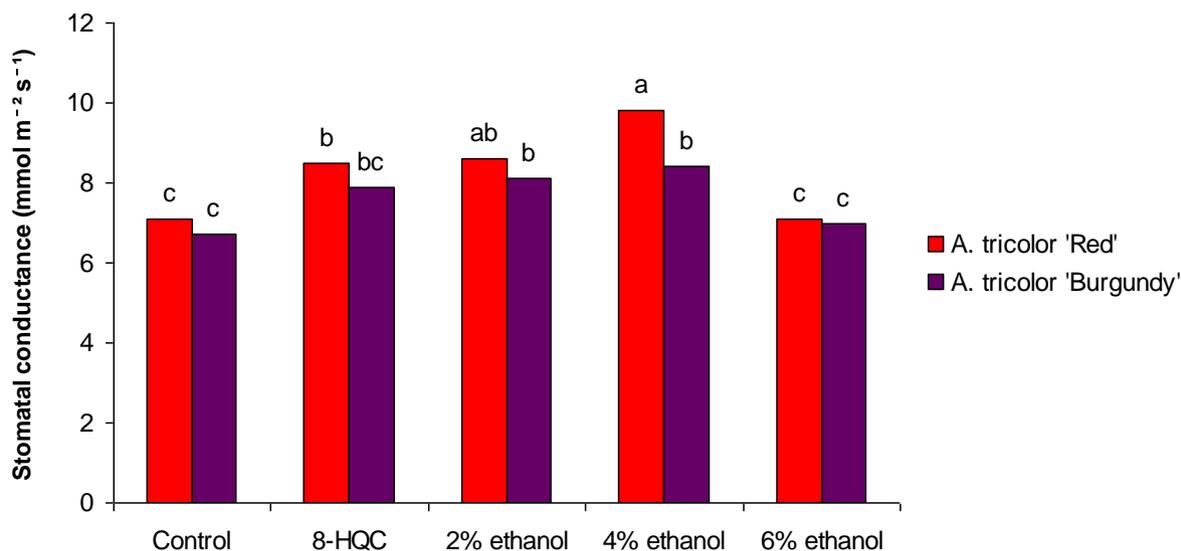


Figure 7. Effects of 200 mg·L⁻¹ 8-Hydroxy-2-quinolinecarboxylic acid (8-HQC) or ethanol (2, 4 and 8%) on the stomatal conductance of cut amaranth (*Amaranthus tricolor*) ‘Red’ and ‘Burgundy’ foliage. A different letters above each bar indicate a significant difference between treatments at $p \leq 0.05$. Values are means (n = 10).

Stomatal conductance is an important indicator of stomatal control of water uptake and assimilation. All the treatments except for 6% ethanol, led to more stomatal conductance than controls (**Fig. 7**). We speculate that this height concentration of ethanol may be toxic to cut amaranth foliage.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research showed that ethanol significantly extended the vase life of cut foliage *Amaranthus tricolor* ‘Red’ and ‘Burgundy’ compared with the control. The change in fresh weight and stomatal conductance were reduced as a result of using ethanol. As far as we known, this is the first time the ethanol could be used as a vase solution for improving the postharvest quality of cut *Amaranthus tricolor* foliage.

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