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# Domestication of the Chilean guava (*Ugni molinae* Turcz.), a forest understorey shrub, must consider light intensity

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## Abstract

A Chilean guava ecotype (*Ugni molinae* Turcz.) was cultivated in Santiago during the summer of 1999/2000 in order to assess the effect of shading on photosynthesis. Plants were grown under either 50% shading or full sunlight and chlorophyll fluorescence, net assimilation rates of CO<sub>2</sub>, photosynthetic pigment contents, were measured 2 months after planting, in each light regime, during the day. The capacity to recover the photochemical efficiency of photosystem II in light grown plants, measured as  $F_v/F_m$  after 30 min dark adaptation was markedly reduced, reaching values lower than 0.5 at midday, with a sunlight PPF of 1600  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ . On the other hand, the shaded plants showed a nearly complete recovery of the parameter. The photochemical quenching of chlorophyll fluorescence, reached a value of 0.47, also at midday, in full light grown plants, nearly half that observed in the shade, indicating a high PSII excitation pressure in the former. The light saturated net CO<sub>2</sub> assimilation rates, measured in controlled conditions of temperature, were markedly lower in the full light plants compared to the shade ones. It is concluded that the Chilean guava is not able to cope with the light intensities characteristic of many Mediterranean climates, resulting in chronic photoinhibition.

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## 1. Introduction

Plants in the field are permanently exposed to changes in photosynthetic photon flux density (PPFD), together with other environmental conditions such as temperature and air

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humidity. Such changes in PPFD occur during the day and in the long term, during the growing season, and plants must adapt their physiology to such changes. Even though there is no evidence that photosynthetic CO<sub>2</sub> assimilation rate correlates with biomass production, it has been commonly observed that the capacity of plants to grow and develop in regimes contrasting with their original habitats, depends on the capacity of such plants to acclimatize at the level of photosynthesis, particularly in the case of temperature and light (Björkman et al., 1974, 1975; Pearcy, 1977).

It has been generally observed that photosynthesis responds proportional by to light intensity, up to a point where further increases in light are followed by constant CO<sub>2</sub> assimilation rate, i.e. photosynthesis becomes light saturated. Therefore, light becomes absorbed in excess of the capacity of leaves to use it in photochemistry. Plants nearly saturate at about 900 μmol photons m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, well below the midday intensity reached in most Mediterranean climates during the summer. When plants are unable to adapt to a condition of excess absorbed energy by the photosynthetic apparatus, photoinhibition, defined as the light dependent reduction of the efficiency of the photosynthetic electron transport, may occur (Jahns and Miede, 1996; Osmond et al., 1993). The primary site of damage during photoinhibition is photosystem II, particularly the reaction center protein, D1. The loss of the photosynthetic activity will depend on the relative rate to which D1 proteins are damaged compared to the rate to which they are synthesized and integrated again into the PSII complex (Baker, 1991). When severe damage occurs, reductions in quantum yield are not reversible in the short term, and even light saturated photosynthetic rates are decreased, being therefore referred to as “chronic” photoinhibition (Osmond, 1994). Photosynthetic organisms, however, have evolved mechanisms to protect themselves against photodamage. Non-photochemical energy dissipation has been described as the most important form of protection, resulting in a lower quantum yield of photosynthesis, similar to photo-induced damage, except that this is rapidly reversible and no maximal photosynthetic rate reduction is observed (Demmig-Adams and Adams, 1996; Horton et al., 1996; Osmond et al., 1993). Therefore, it has been referred to as “dynamic” photo-inhibition (Osmond, 1994). Other mechanisms for protection consist of chlorophyll concentration changes in order to reduce the extent of the absorbed light (Giardi et al., 1996; Murchie and Horton, 1997); chloroplast movements, reducing the organelle and photosynthetic complexes exposure to light (Haupt, 1990); increases in the capacity for scavenging the active oxygen species by means of increases in scavenging enzyme activity and/or concentration of non-enzymatic antioxidants (Bowler et al., 1992; Foyer et al., 1994); and leaf movement or paraheliotropism, avoiding direct exposure to sun, therefore avoiding light and heat (Ludlow and Björkman, 1984).

Plants have been classified, according to their natural growing environment and CO<sub>2</sub> assimilation rate as shade or sun plants. However, no conclusion can be drawn, regarding the capacity of such plants to adapt to different light regimes. This is particularly relevant for the domestication of wild species for agricultural purposes. The Chilean guava, also known as *murtilla* or *murta* (*Ugni molinae*) is a Myrthaceae species native from south Chile, growing in woodland edges and forest understorey characterized by low PPFD. This shrub has been gaining attention from farmers in Chile, for jam, tea and liquor production, and has been introduced in the UK and Australia, also for ornamental use. Domestication of

this species, however, has been mainly practised in full light conditions and in warmer climates compared to that of its origin.

The aim of the present study was to assess the capacity of Chilean guava plants to adapt, at the level of photosynthesis, to the light environment of central Chile, characteristic of many Mediterranean climates. Shading was considered as a means of alleviating a possible photoinhibitory condition in plants.

## 2. Materials and methods

The experiments were conducted in 1999–2000 at the Agronomical Research and Experimental Station (Antumapu) at the Faculty of Agronomical Sciences of the University of Chile in Santiago, Chile, 33°40'S, 70°38'W. The experimental design was a randomized complete block with four replications. Each block consisted of two plots, corresponding to shade and full light treatments, with six plants, 0.6 m apart in the row. Plots were 3.6 m from one each other. Shade condition was achieved by means of black mesh of 50% transmittance, placed 1 m above ground.

Plants were asexually propagated through cuttings and rooted during the winter, after which they were planted in November 1999, when a strong root system was already formed. Irrigation was by controlled drip (NAAN, Israel) at  $4.7 \text{ l m}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$ .

Photochemical ( $q_P$ ) and non-photochemical quenching ( $q_N$ ) of chlorophyll fluorescence were determined during the day. Leaves were dark adapted the afternoon before measurements by means of leaf clips. Early in the morning, in the dark-adapted leaves, the minimal ( $F_0$ ) and maximal ( $F_m$ ) emitted fluorescence were recorded with a modulated fluorimeter (Hansatech FMS1, UK), and the leaf clips immediately removed after marking the position on the leaf, in order to measure  $F_s$ ,  $F_m'$  and  $F_0'$  in exactly the same spot during the day. Measurements were done with care not to disturb the leaf position and light exposure on the leaf. After the steady state fluorescence,  $F_s$ , was measured,  $F_m'$  was recorded by means of a  $3500 \mu\text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  PAR light flash and the leaf darkened with a black cloth for 30 s after measuring  $F_0'$  using far red light. All measurements were done with the same hardware configuration. The parameters  $q_P$  and  $q_N$  were calculated according to van Kooten and Snell (1990) in which  $q_P = (F_m' - F_s') / (F_m' - F_0')$  and  $q_N = 1 - (F_m' - F_0') / (F_m - F_0)$ . Recovery of the maximum quantum yield, measured as  $F_v / F_m$ , in which  $F_v = F_m - F_0$  was determined, dark adapting leaves for 30 min with leaf clips, on the same leaves during the day. Different leaves were used for the fluorescence quenching parameters and  $F_v / F_m$ , with three and five replications per plot every measuring time, respectively.

Net  $\text{CO}_2$  assimilation rates and stomatal conductance were determined by means of an Infrared Gas Analyser (IRGA) (ADC-1, UK). Measurements were carried out in laboratory conditions on detached leaves collected immediately before measurement and kept in humid petri dishes. Leaves were detached in order to increase the leaf area by measuring two leaves from the same plant, simultaneously inside the photosynthetic chamber. Measurements were carried out at different light intensities, supplied from a cold light source (Schott, Germany), and measuring from darkness to the highest intensity. Four plants per plot were measured.

Leaf temperature was measured with an infrared thermometer (Extech, USA) using the same leaves as for fluorescence measurements, and same intervals.

Ambient PAR light was measured by means of a PAR light meter (Licor, Li-182, USA) positioning the sensor perpendicular to the sunlight and parallel to the ground. Air temperature and relative humidity were obtained from a hygrometer (Extech 445900, USA), measured 1 m above ground.

Four leaf discs of 5 mm diameter were taken from every plant and macerated in a mortar with 1 ml ethanol 80% v/v. The homogenate was taken to a volume of 1.5 ml with ethanol 80% and centrifuged at 12,000 rpm for 2 min. Total carotenoids, chlorophyll *a* and *b* were determined according to Lichtenthaler and Wellburn (1983), measuring 470, 649 and 665 nm absorbance in a double beam spectrophotometer (Shimadzu, UV-1601, Japan).

Measurements of plant height and internode length were carried out once per week. Each measurement was made to every plant in each plot.

Standard analysis of variance techniques were used to assess the significance of treatment means based on a completely randomized design. The data shown are mean values  $\pm$  S.E. Significance was represented by  $*P < 0.05$ .

### 3. Results

As expected, the period from January to February 2000 was characterized by clear skies, with average PPFD recordings of 800 and 1600  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  PAR at 13:00 h in shade and full light, respectively (Fig. 1A). Fluorescence measurements were performed on 25 and 26 January, both days with identical PPFD (Fig. 1B). The lowest PPFD was observed early in the morning, at 8:30, with values of 90  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  and 620  $\text{m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  PAR in the shade and full light, respectively (Fig. 1B), and reaching the highest values at 13:00, similar to

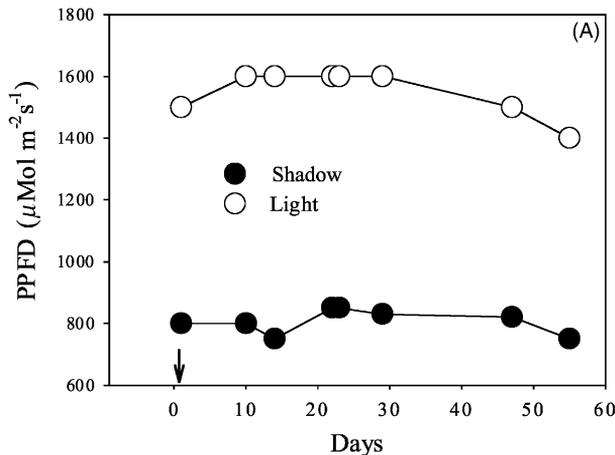


Fig. 1. Environmental parameters during the season and the day of fluorescence measurement. (A) Recorded PAR during the 2 months of measurements at 13:00 h, arrow indicating 4 January; (B) PAR light; (C) relative humidity; and (D) air temperature, taken during the day of fluorescence measurements, from 8:30 to 18:30 h.

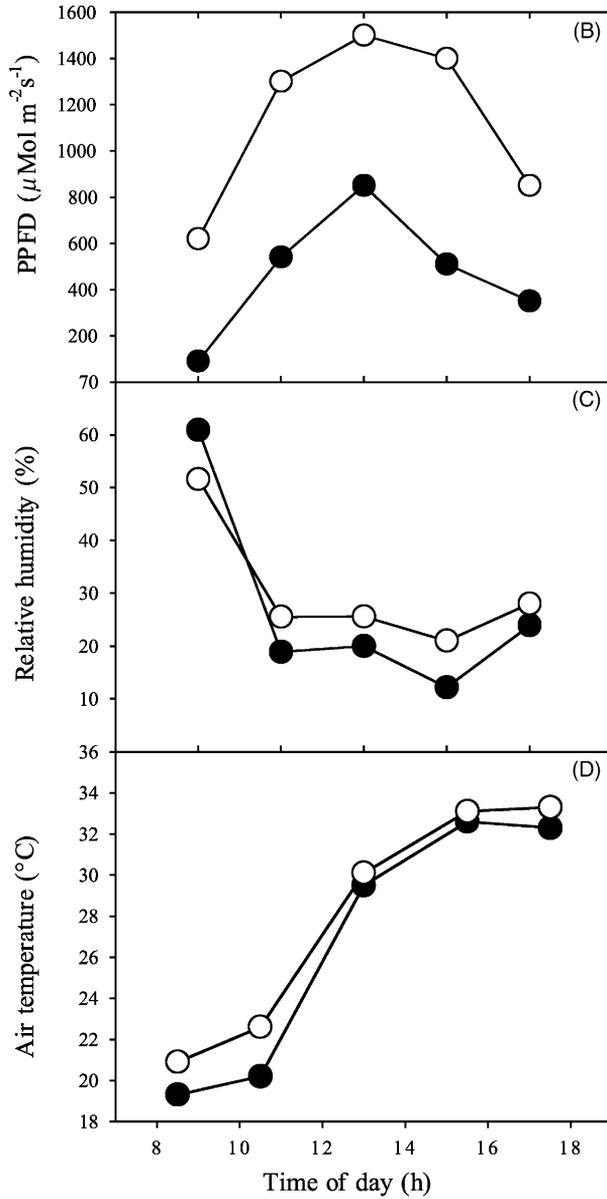


Fig. 1. (Continued).

that already mentioned as the 2 months average (Fig. 1A). At 17:30, in the afternoon, the PPFD declined to 350 and 850  $\text{m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  in shade and full light, respectively. In the afternoon and, particularly, early morning, the PPFD values in shade plots were less than 50% of that in full light, as a result of the lower angle of incident light reaching the mesh,

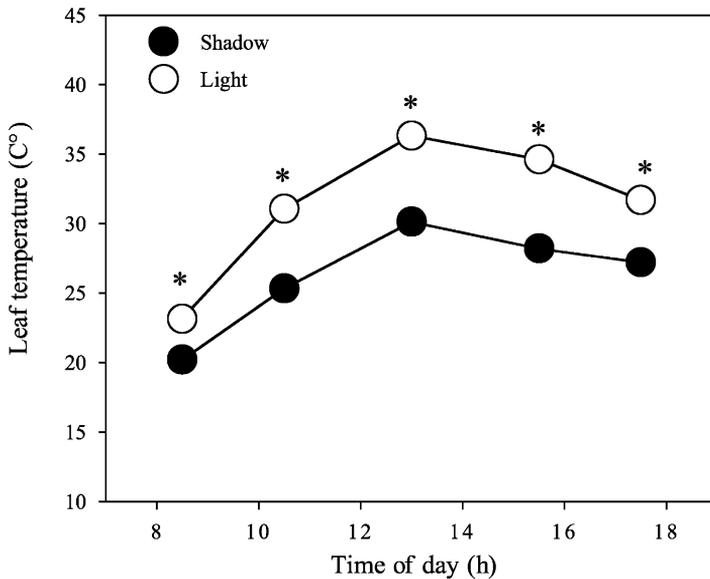


Fig. 2. Leaf temperature from light and shade plants measured from 8:30 to 18:30 h. Asterisk (\*) represents significant differences between light conditions for every hour ( $P \leq 0.05$ ).

compared to midday. Air humidity, on the other hand, strongly decreased during the day for the shade and full light, from 60.9 and 51.6% at 8:30 h to 12.2 and 21% at 15:30 h, respectively (Fig. 1C). Air temperature followed the light intensity, reaching 35.2 and 33.9 °C in full light and shade, respectively, at 15:30 h, slightly decreasing later (Fig. 1D). The lowest temperatures were observed at 8:30 h with values of 20 and 19.3 °C in full light and shade plots, respectively (Fig. 1D). The temperature difference between shade and full light never exceeded 2 °C.

Shading resulted in a significant by lower leaf temperature compared to full light plants throughout the day (Fig. 2). Also, leaf temperature measured from 13:00 to 17:30 h in leaves from shade plants was the same or lower than air temperature, in contrast to full light grown plants with higher leaf temperature compared to air (Figs. 1D and 2).

PPFD higher than that saturating for photosynthesis, induces non-radiative de-excitation mechanisms at the chlorophyll level in the PSII complexes, resulting in a decreased maximum quantum yield of photosynthesis. Such changes are partially or totally reversed in darkness, and the extent up to which the maximum quantum yield is recovered, has been used as a probe for photoinhibition in leaves (Adams et al., 1990). The  $F_v/F_m$  parameter has been correlated with the maximum quantum yield of photosynthesis (Björkman and Demmig, 1987; Bolhar-Nordenkamp and Öquist, 1993; Cornic and Briantais, 1991; Genty et al., 1989) reaching a maximum theoretical value of 0.85 (Bolhar-Nordenkamp et al., 1991). It is suggested, from Fig. 3, that plants grown in shade conditions nearly recovered to the maximum quantum yield for photochemistry in 30 min of dark adaptation throughout the day. In contrast, plants grown under full sunlight recovered the  $F_v/F_m$

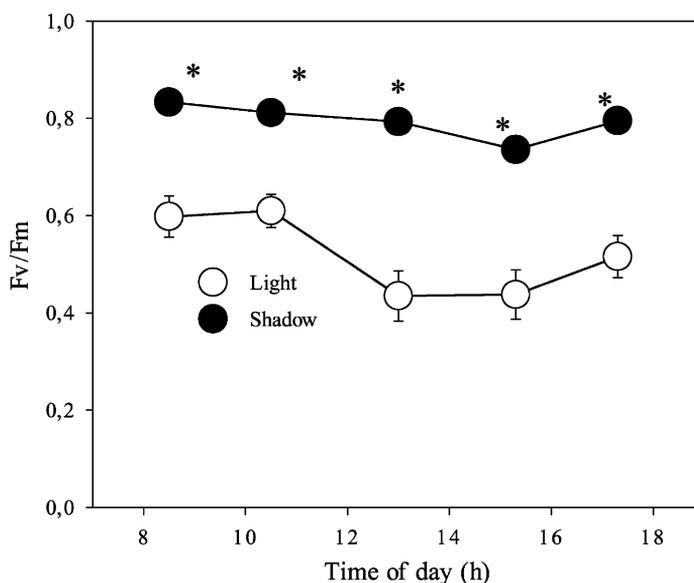


Fig. 3.  $F_v/F_m$  measured in leaves from light and shade plants during the day, from 8:30 to 18:30 h, after 30 min dark adaptation, except for the first measurement, for which leaves were dark adapted from the 19:00 h the afternoon before. Asterisk (\*) represents significant differences between light conditions for every hour ( $P \leq 0.05$ ). Bars represent S.E.

parameter to a maximum of about 0.6 at 10:30, and values lower than 0.5 were observed at 13:00 and 15:30 h (Fig. 3).

The parameter  $q_P$ , which represents the proportion of PSII reaction centers in an open state, i.e. capable of charge separation, remains highly constant and close to 0.9 in the shaded plants during the day (Fig. 4A). As for the full light grown plants,  $q_P$  was always lower on average compared to the former, such difference being significant from midday onwards. The lowest value, of about 0.47 occurs in full light leaves at 13:00 (Fig. 4A). As expected,  $q_N$ , which is proportional to the absorbed energy re-emitted as heat from the PSII complexes, followed changes opposite to  $q_P$  (Fig. 4B). Highest values were observed in full light grown plants, particularly at 13:00 h with a value of 0.8, nearly double than that observed for the shaded plants at the same hour. Similar to  $q_P$ , differences in  $q_N$  were significant in the afternoon (Fig. 4B).

The light regime also induced changes in pigment composition of leaves, resulting in significantly higher contents for the shade plants (Fig. 5). Pigment content in the shade plants was higher than the full light, with 68% more total carotenoids, and 70 and 48% more chlorophyll *a* and *b*, respectively, compared to the full light. The chlorophyll *a/b* ratio was also significantly different between treatments, being 33% higher in shade compared to full light grown plants.

Leaves from full light plants shows a lower capacity for photosynthesis for PPFD higher than  $200 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  (Fig. 6). Independently of the light regime, the assimilation rates were low, reaching less than  $4 \mu\text{mol CO}_2 \text{m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  under the highest intensity measured (Fig. 6). The observed differences in carbon assimilation does not seem to be related to

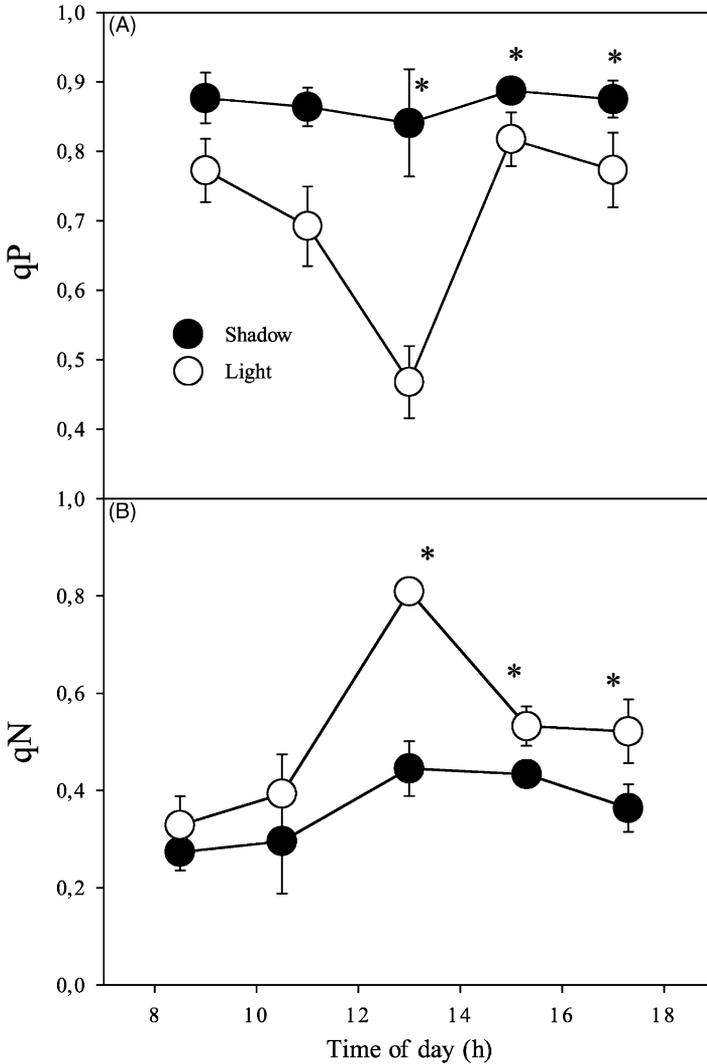


Fig. 4. Photochemical (A) and non-photochemical (B) chlorophyll fluorescence quenching, measured from 8:30 to 18:30 h in leaves from light and shade plants. Asterisk (\*) represents significant differences between light conditions for every hour ( $P \leq 0.05$ ). Bars represent S.E.

stomatal characteristics since no difference in stomatal conductance, nor pore width or stomatal density were observed between treatments (data not shown).

Three weeks from transplanting, shade plants reached greater height on average than those in full light reaching, 20 and 10 cm, respectively (Fig. 7A). The taller plants grown in shade, however, were not necessarily a consequence of higher dry mass accumulation, but for the known effect of low PPFD on plant elongation. The shaded plants, in fact, had longer internodes than full light grown plants (Fig. 7B) (data not shown).

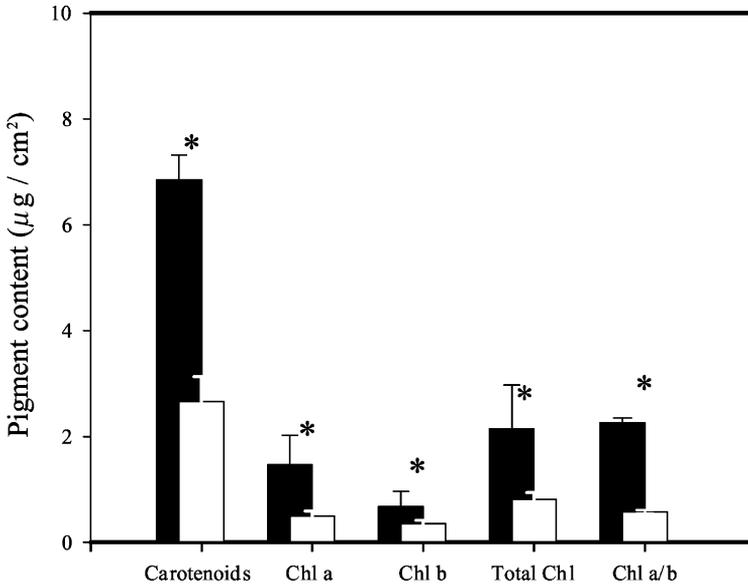


Fig. 5. Total carotenoids, chlorophyll *a*, chlorophyll *b*, total chlorophyll and the chlorophyll *a/b* ratio in leaves from light and shade plants, taken 1 February. Asterisk (\*) represents significant differences between light conditions for every hour ( $P \leq 0.05$ ). Bars represent S.E.

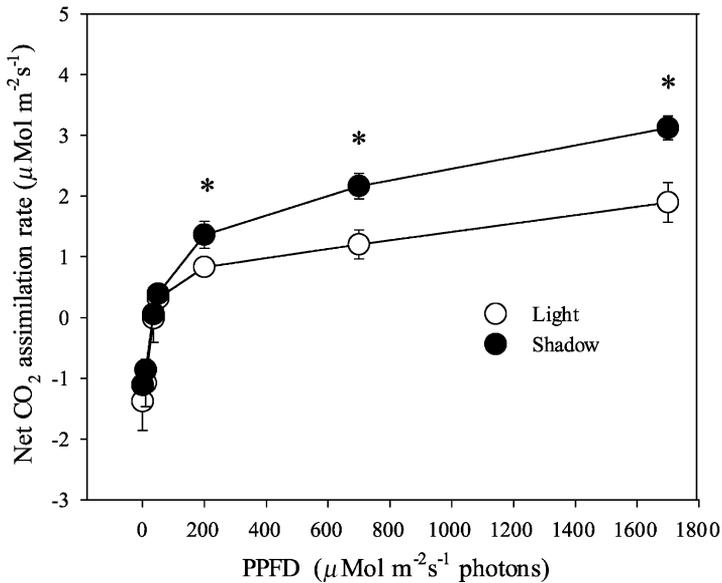


Fig. 6. Net CO<sub>2</sub> assimilation in leaves from light and shade plants, collected on 1 January, at different light intensities, from darkness up to 1750  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  PAR photons. Asterisk (\*) represents significant differences between light conditions for every hour ( $P \leq 0.05$ ). Bars represent S.E.

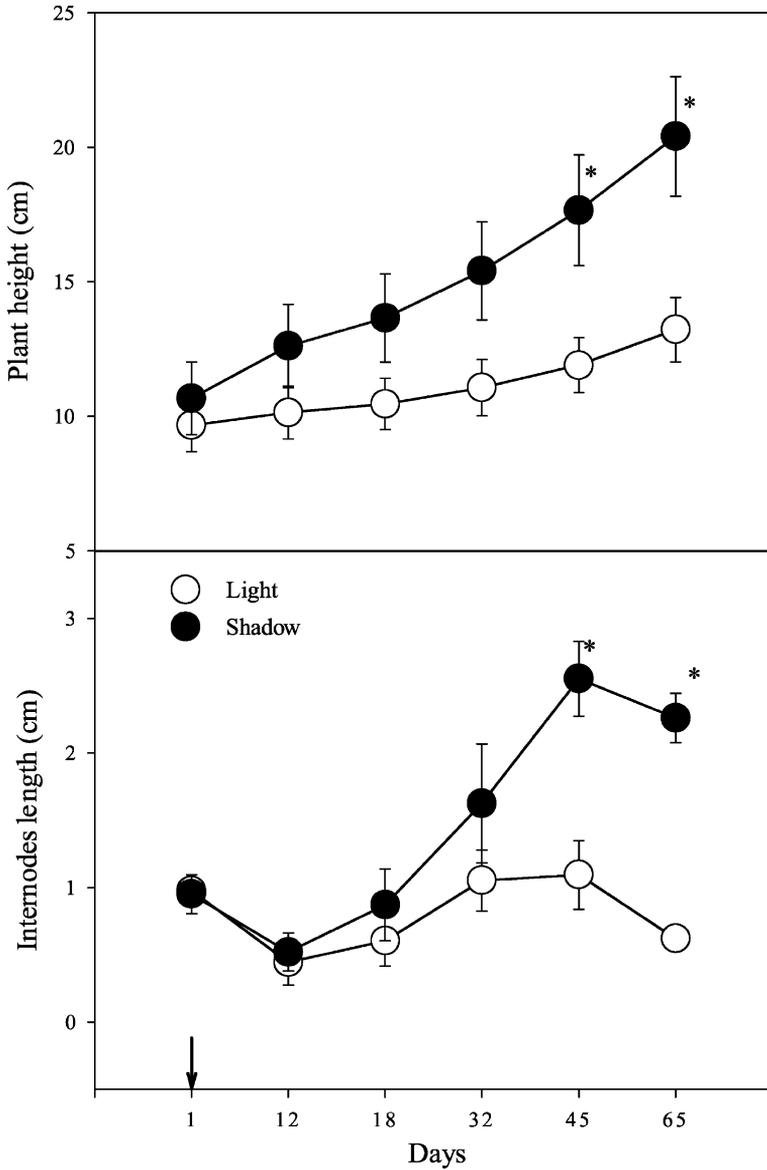


Fig. 7. (A) Plant height and (B) average internode length, measured during the growing season in light and shade plants; arrow indicates 4 January. Asterisk (\*) represents significant differences between light conditions for every hour ( $P \leq 0.05$ ). Bars represent S.E.

#### 4. Discussion

The PPFD and air temperature observed in the present study (Fig. 1A and D) may constitute a strong limitation for some species to the functioning of the photosynthetic

carbon metabolism, inducing photoinhibition (Long and Humphries, 1994). High PPFD from sunlight may not only induce over-excitation of the photosynthetic apparatus as it is suggested in the present study from the poor capacity for  $F_v/F_m$  recovery (Fig. 3), but the extremely low  $q_p$  values and concomitant high  $q_N$  during midday in full light grown plants (Fig. 4), may also be linked to increases in temperature of leaf tissues. Leaf temperature of full sunlight plants was 5 °C higher than air temperature at midday (Figs. 1D and 2). High temperature is responsible for alterations on the functioning and organization of the photosynthetic apparatus particularly PSII components (Melis, 1991; Pastenes and Horton, 1996a,b) and electron transport in chloroplasts (Pastenes and Horton, 1999), also in carbon metabolism through increases in photorespiration because of changes in gas solubility and the Rubisco enzyme activity (Crafts-Brander and Salvucci, 2000; Jensen, 2000). The latter effect is also induced by transient water vapor deficits, in turn induced by heat. As a consequence stomatal closure occurs, reducing the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration readily available for reduction (Hsiao, 1973; Mott and Parkurst, 1991; Pugnaire et al., 1999; Weise et al., 1990) and, therefore, inducing an over-excitation of the photosynthetic apparatus, particularly photosystem II (PSII) with losses of photosynthetic quantum yield (Ludlow and Björkman, 1984).

The full light grown plants, in fact, were unable to recover the photochemical efficiency of photosystem II, measured as  $F_v/F_m$ , to values close to the theoretical maximum of 0.83 after 30 min dark adaptation. It is known that such reductions correspond to both: non-radiative dissipation of the energy absorbed by PSII complexes as a result of down-regulation of PSII photochemistry (Björkman and Demmig-Adams, 1994; Horton and Ruban, 1994), and to direct damage to PSII (Andersson and Barber, 1996; Aro et al., 1993). The decline in  $F_v/F_m$  in the full sunlight plants, was a minimum at midday, but even early in the morning the parameter was not higher than 0.6. The  $F_v/F_m$  measurements carried out at 8:30 resulted from dark adaptation throughout the night, from 19:00 h the previous, to 8:30 h the following day, as necessary for calculations of  $q_N$  during the day (see Section 2). The poor capacity to recover  $F_v/F_m$ , even for such a long time in darkness is, therefore, an indication that long-term photoinhibition affects leaves from those plants. In contrast, shaded plants show complete recovery of the parameter with values higher than 0.8, most of the day, characteristic of healthy dark-adapted leaves of C3 plants (Demmig and Björkman, 1987).

It is evident that light intensity exceeds the capacity of leaves to use that energy in photochemistry in the exposed plants, since the extent of open PSII reaction centers, represented by  $q_p$  is remarkably depressed during midday (Fig. 4). The light driven electron transport in chloroplasts, couples the acidification of the lumen, necessary for ATP synthesis. Also, lumen pH mediates the activation of non-photochemical energy dissipation mechanisms at the PSII antenna level (Horton and Ruban, 1994; Horton et al., 1994), the extent of which is represented by  $q_N$ . Non-photochemical energy dissipation has been described as the most important form of protection against excess light, resulting in a lower quantum yield of photosynthesis, similar to photo-induced damage, except that no maximal photosynthetic rate reduction is observed (Demmig-Adams and Adams, 1996; Horton et al., 1996; Osmond et al., 1993).  $q_N$  contributes to maintain PSII reaction centers in an open state, i.e. capable of performing electron transport and, therefore, avoiding over-excitation of antenna chlorophylls.  $q_N$ , in the shaded plants (Fig. 4) only slightly increased during midday, reflecting a more balanced light excitation to reducing power and energy

demand ratio. On the fully exposed plants, however,  $q_N$  increased up to 0.8 at midday. Such a high value was unable to maintain PSII reaction centers. It has been suggested, in fact, that  $q_P$  values close to 0.5 would be a threshold for long-term photoinhibition in many species and growth conditions (Öquist et al., 1992). Therefore, the decrease in the  $F_v/F_m$  ratio in light plants, which indicates a loss of the photochemical efficiency, clearly correlates with the low  $q_P$  values (Fig. 4).

Photosynthetic pigment content in leaves has been correlated with the capacity of plants to acclimate to a different light environment (Allen, 1992; Jahns and Miede, 1996; Färber et al., 1997), thus smaller chlorophyll contents imply a lower excitation pressure on PSII (Baker, 1991; Demmig-Adams and Adams, 1992; Krause, 1988). Even though full light plants resulted in lower chlorophyll *a* and *b* content (Fig. 5), this is not necessarily a consequence of acclimation. High temperatures, in fact, as well as high light are known to induce senescence in leaf tissues, and to shorten the life of leaves (Lawlor, 1994). In the present study, leaf temperature of light grown plants was even higher than air temperature from early morning to midday (Figs. 1D and 2). Also, acclimation has been suggested to occur, decreasing preferentially PSII antenna size, therefore increasing the chlorophyll *a/b* ratio (Leong and Anderson, 1984). In the present study, the pigment content in light grown plants, characterized by a low chlorophyll *a/b* ratio, suggests that no acclimation to light occurred, but possibly damage to the photosynthetic apparatus. It is well known that non-reversible photoinhibition in plants is partly the consequence of active oxygen species formed in the chloroplasts (Demmig-Adams and Adams, 1996; Foyer et al., 1994) responsible for cell toxicity and loss of cell components, like photosynthetic complexes associated with light harvesting pigments (Asada, 1994).

Photoinhibition in plants implies a lowered photosynthetic capacity, in many cases associated with a lower capacity for plant dry mass accumulation (Ögren and Sjöström, 1990; Winter and Königer, 1991). Plants grown in the shade reached higher net photosynthetic rates upon illumination with light intensities higher than  $200 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ , compared to full light grown plants. Such differences might have been even higher in the field, where leaf temperature and, therefore, water vapor pressure deficit and stomatal conductance are very likely unfavorable for light plant photosynthesis. Therefore, in addition to: (a) the poor capacity to recover  $F_v/F_m$ , even after overnight darkness; (b)  $q_P$  values during midday close to 0.5; and (c) general loss of photosynthetic pigments and the decline in light saturated  $\text{CO}_2$  assimilation, further suggests that the Chilean guava is sensitive to high light intensities, being seriously photoinhibited. While the smaller size of light grown plants results from shorter internodes, but no assessment of plant dry mass was carried out to be correlated with the light effects on photosynthesis. Shading has already been used in horticulture in Mediterranean climates, in order to increase yield and fruit quality. Even though shading might not be an economical option at present, Chilean guava could be produced as an intercrop under tree canopies, increasing the profitability of land.

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