

Ripening behaviour of capsicum
(*Capsicum annuum* L.) fruit

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Statement	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Chapter One - General introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Literature review	2
1.2.1 Capsicum species	2
1.2.2 Fruit maturation and ripening	2
1.2.3 Respiration and ethylene production during fruit ripening	4
1.2.4 Major changes during fruit ripening	8
1.2.5 Ripening regulation	13
1.3 Research aims	19
Chapter Two - General materials and methods	20
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 Plant materials	20
2.2.1 Cultivar selection	20
2.2.2 Plant growth	21
2.2.3 Pollination and fruit set	23
2.3 Fruit sampling and assessment	24
2.3.1 Fruit sampling	24
2.3.2 Gas measurement	24
2.3.3 Extractable colour measurement	26
2.3.4 Total soluble solid content (TSSC)	27
2.3.5 Photography	28
2.4 Statistical analysis	28

Chapter Three - Ripening behaviour of capsicum fruit on and off the plant	29
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Materials and methods	30
3.2.1 Plant materials	30
3.2.2 Growth curve determination	30
3.2.3 Sampling time determination	30
3.2.4 Experimental design and methods	31
3.3 Results	33
3.3.1 “Papri Queen” fruit	33
3.3.2 “Aries” cultivar	41
3.3.3 “Caysan” cultivar	48
3.4 Discussion	55
3.5 Conclusion	60
Chapter Four - Effects of preharvest application on ripening of green harvested “Papri Queen”	62
4.1 Introduction	62
4.2 Materials and methods	63
4.2.1 Plant materials	63
4.2.2 Experimental design and methods	64
4.3 Result	69
4.3.1 Effects of cincturing	69
4.3.2 Effects of preharvest application of plant growth regulators	74
4.3.3 Effects of preharvest application of ethephon	77
4.4 Discussion	80
4.4.1 Effect of cincturing	80
4.4.2 Effect of preharvest application of plant growth regulators	82
4.4.3 Effect of preharvest application of ethephon	84
4.5 Conclusion	86
Chapter Five - Effects of postharvest application on ripening of green harvested “Papri Queen”	88
5.1 Introduction	88
5.2 Materials and methods	89

5.2.1 Cultivar selected and plant materials	89
5.2.2 Experimental design and methods	90
5.3 Results	92
5.3.1 Effect of postharvest application of plant growth regulators	92
5.3.2 Effect of postharvest application of ethephon	94
5.4 Discussion	97
5.5 Conclusion	100
Chapter Six - Effect of ethephon treatment on the expression of carotenoid synthesis genes	102
6.1 Introduction	102
6.2 Materials and method	103
6.2.1 Plant materials	103
6.2.2 Chemicals	103
6.2.3 Experimental design	104
6.2.4 Probe preparation	105
6.2.5 Northern analysis	109
6.2.6 Southern analysis	111
6.3 Result	112
6.3.1 Probe sequences	112
6.3.2 Expression profile of <i>Lcy</i>	115
6.3.3 Expression profile of <i>Ccs</i>	118
6.4 Discussion	122
6.5 Conclusion	125
Chapter Seven - General discussion	126
7.1 Introduction	126
7.2 Outcomes of the study	127
7.3 Future directions	130
7.4 Conclusion	131
References	133
Appendices	146

Abstract

Fruit of *Capsicum annuum* L. (capsicum or pepper) are one of the major sources of red food colourant and pungency for spice production. In the spice production industry, fruit are mechanically harvested at different ripeness stages and fruit colour needs to be synchronised before being processed. However, even though capsicum ripens normally on the plant it often fails to ripen fully and turn red once harvested at the green stage. Attempts to promote ripening of harvested fruits have had limited success and the reason for this has been unclear. This project, therefore, investigated ripening behaviour on and off the plant of capsicum fruit grown in Australia and examined effects of pre- and postharvest applications on ripening of green harvested fruit.

To examine ripening behaviour on and off the plant, capsicum fruit from three different cultivars (a mild paprika type *cv.* “Papri Queen”, a cayenne chilli *cv.* “Caysan”, and a sweet type bell pepper *cv.* “Aries”) were either allowed to ripen naturally on the plant or harvested at three different maturity stages: light green, deep green and breaker. Harvested fruit were stored individually at room temperature and several ripening characteristics including internal ethylene (C₂H₄) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration, extractable colour, 1-aminocyclopropane-1-carboxylic acid (ACC) synthase and oxidase activity, and total soluble solid content (TSSC) were studied during storage.

There was very limited involvement of C₂H₄ during ripening of capsicum and the change in ACC synthase and ACC oxidase (two enzymes in C₂H₄ biosynthesis pathway) activity was not closely related to that of C₂H₄. However, it appeared that colour development in *cv.* “Papri Queen” was closely associated with what C₂H₄ production did occur while a climacteric-like peak of C₂H₄ could be observed in all fruit from *cv.* “Caysan”.

For all three cultivars, the level of internal CO₂ concentration, extractable colour and TSSC were greater in fruit ripened on the plant followed by fruit harvested at the breaker, deep green and light green stage, respectively. Fruit harvested at the light

green stage failed to change colour properly and had very low levels of internal CO₂ concentration and TSSC while fruit harvested from the breaker stage onwards ripened normally and developed sufficient colour for spice processing. This may suggest a role of external carbon-supply during ripening.

To study the effect of the external-carbon supply during ripening, the stem of fruit were cinctured when fruit reached the light green stage and fruit were left to ripen on the plant. Cincturing delayed colour development of fruit by approximately five days but cinctured fruit were still able to turn red and develop extractable colour higher than the acceptable level of 140 ASTA units. Cincturing did not significantly alter other ripening behaviour such as CO₂ concentration or TSSC. The lack of external carbon-supply is, therefore, unlikely to play a major role in the failure of green harvested fruit to ripen.

To study the effect of application of plant growth regulators (both pre- and postharvest), an effective method of solution application utilising cincturing was firstly developed. Different plant growth regulator solutions including ethephon, naphthalene acetic acid, abscisic acid, jasmonic acid, sucrose, and different combinations of these were applied to fruit at the light green stage to study preharvest effects on ripening parameters during storage. Only treatment with high concentrations of ethephon increased the extractable colour higher than the acceptable level of 140 ASTA units and induced the complete degradation of chlorophyll. To study effects of postharvest application, 10 µL of various plant growth regulators was dropped into the hole created on the stem of harvested fruit for ten consecutive days. Treatment with ethephon significantly increased extractable colour and degraded chlorophyll content of fruit. Pre- and postharvest ethephon treatment strongly up-regulated *Capsanthin-capsorubin synthase (Ccs)* gene expression in a manner similar to the up-regulation of *Ccs* observed in fruit ripened on the plant. This explains the effect of C₂H₄ on colour development and also indicates the possible reason for the failure of green harvested fruit to ripen. However, the *Ccs* gene expression and chlorophyll degradation induced by ethephon was not visible until 14 days after harvest which indicated it may not be a direct effect and other signal transduction factors may be involved. When fruit are ripened on the plant, colour development may, therefore, be induced by ripening-related

factors (other than C_2H_4) which is possibly inhibited or inactivated when fruit are harvested at the green stage. C_2H_4 application to fruit at this stage may help to reactivate or recover these factors which in turn induce colour development. Thus, although capsicum fruit show typical non-climacteric behaviour, C_2H_4 appears to be involved in some aspects of the ripening process.

Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

I consent to this thesis being made available for photocopying and loan.

Pham Thi Ngoc Thang

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List of Tables

Table 3.1	Score for external colour of capsicum fruit ripened on the plant and seven sampling times (highlighted in grey).	31
Table 3.2	The time course (days after anthesis) for fruit from “Papri Queen” to reach six colour stages.	35
Table 3.3	Internal ethylene concentration of fruit from “Papri Queen” ($\mu\text{L L}^{-1}$) during ripening.	37
Table 3.4	The time course (days after anthesis) for “Aries” to five colour stages.	42
Table 3.5	Internal ethylene concentration of fruit from “Aries” ($\mu\text{L L}^{-1}$) during ripening.	44
Table 3.6	The time course (days after anthesis) for “Caysan” to five colour stages.	49
Table 4.1	Description of preharvest treatments used in the preliminary trial.	67
Table 4.2	Description of preharvest treatments used in the trial studied effects of ethephon.	68
Table 5.1	Description of postharvest application of plant growth regulators.	91
Table 5.2	Description of postharvest application of ethephon.	92
Table 6.1	Composition and concentration of solutions used in this chapter	104

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	The chlorophyll degradation pathway in higher plants adapted from Hortensteiner (1999). The enzymes involved in each step are in italics.	9
Figure 1.2	The carotenoid biosynthesis pathway in capsicum fruit adapted from Camara <i>et al.</i> (1995). The enzymes for each step are in italics.	11
Figure 1.3	The ethylene biosynthesis pathway.	17
Figure 2.1	Three cultivars used for experimentation described in this thesis: “Papri Queen” (left), “Caysan” (middle), and “Aries” (right).	21
Figure 2.2	Seedlings of “Papri Queen” (after germination) in 4-inch round pots (left) and transplanted seedlings in 5-inch square pots (right).	22
Figure 2.3	The first flower of plants was labelled with the anthesis date.	23
Figure 2.4	Fruit were stored individually in an aluminium foil tray (18x10x5 cm) during postharvest storage.	24
Figure 2.5	Gas chromatography system (Varian Australia): GC 3400 for measuring CO ₂ concentration (left) and GC 3300 for C ₂ H ₄ concentration (right).	25
Figure 2.6	Electric mill to grind dry samples (Kika-werke GMBH, Germany).	26
Figure 2.7	The standard glass reference for extractable colour measurement (NIST-USA).	27
Figure 3.1	Change in length (■) and diameter (◆) of fruit from “Papri Queen” during development and ripening in winter (A) and summer (B).	34
Figure 3.2	Change in internal CO ₂ concentration (mL L ⁻¹ g ⁻¹) of fruit from “Papri Queen” during ripening.	36
Figure 3.3	Change in ACCS activity (μmol g ⁻¹ h ⁻¹) of fruit from “Papri Queen” during ripening.	38

Figure 3.4	Change in ACCO activity ($\text{nL g}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$) in fruit from “Papri Queen” during ripening.	39
Figure 3.5	Change in extractable colour (ASTA unit) of fruit from “Papri Queen” during ripening.	40
Figure 3.6	Change in TSSC (B°x) of fruit from “Papri Queen” during ripening.	41
Figure 3.7	Change in length (■) and diameter (◆) of fruit from “Aries” during development and ripening.	42
Figure 3.8	Change in internal CO_2 concentration of fruit from “Aries” ($\text{mL L}^{-1} \text{g}^{-1}$) during ripening.	43
Figure 3.9	Change in ACCS activity ($\mu\text{mol g}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$) of fruit from “Aries” during ripening.	45
Figure 3.10	Change in ACCO activity ($\text{nL g}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$) in fruit from “Aries” during ripening.	46
Figure 3.11	Change in extractable colour (ASTA unit) of fruit from “Aries” during ripening.	47
Figure 3.12	Change in TSSC (B°x) of fruit from “Aries” during ripening.	48
Figure 3.13	Change in length (■) and diameter (◆) of fruit from “Caysan” during development and ripening.	49
Figure 3.14	Change in internal CO_2 concentration ($\text{mL L}^{-1} \text{g}^{-1}$) of fruit from “Caysan” during ripening.	50
Figure 3.15	Change in internal C_2H_4 concentration ($\mu\text{L L}^{-1}$) of fruit from “Caysan” during ripening.	51
Figure 3.16	Change in ACCS activity ($\mu\text{mol g}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$) of fruit from “Caysan” during ripening.	52
Figure 3.17	Change in ACCO activity ($\text{nL g}^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$) of fruit from “Caysan” during ripening.	53
Figure 3.18	Change in extractable colour (ASTA unit) of fruit from “Caysan” during ripening.	54
Figure 3.19	Change in TSSC (B°x) of fruit from “Caysan” during ripening.	55
Figure 4.1	Cincturing of Capsicum fruit.	66
Figure 4.2	Penetration of dye solution through fruit tissue.	66
Figure 4.3	Cinctured fruit were able to turn breaker (left) and eventually	69

	red (right).	
Figure 4.4	Change in extractable colour (ASTA unit) of control fruit (◆) and cinctured fruit (■) ripened on the plant in summer (A) and winter (B).	70
Figure 4.5	Change in internal CO ₂ concentration (mL L ⁻¹ g ⁻¹) of control fruit (◆) and cinctured fruit (■) ripened on the plant in summer (A) and winter (B).	72
Figure 4.6	Change in TSSC (B ^o x) of control fruit (◆) and cinctured fruit (■) ripened on the plant in summer (A) and winter (B).	73
Figure 4.7	Extractable colour (ASTA) of fruit treated with different plant growth regulators (Table 4.1).	74
Figure 4.8	The effect of preharvest application of ethephon on colour development of capsicum fruit.	75
Figure 4.9	Internal CO ₂ concentrations (mL L ⁻¹ g ⁻¹) of fruit treated with different plant growth regulators (Table 4.1).	76
Figure 4.10	Change in respiration rate (mM CO ₂ g ⁻¹ h ⁻¹) of control and treated fruit during postharvest storage	76
Figure 4.11	Total soluble solid content (B ^o x) of fruit treated with different plant growth regulators (Table 4.1).	77
Figure 4.12	Fruit treated with 3 x 48,000 ppm ethephon solution turned deep red and partially dried at 25 days after harvest.	78
Figure 4.13	Fruit treated with ethephon solution were infected with fungus at 25 days after harvest.	78
Figure 4.14	Change in extractable colour (ASTA unit) of fruit treated with different concentrations of ethephon solution: 0 (■); 2,400 (■); 4,800 (■); 7,200 (■); 48,000 (■) and 3 x 48,000 ppm (■).	79
Figure 4.15	Change in chlorophyll content (mg g ⁻¹ FW) of fruit treated with different concentrations of ethephon solution: 0 (■); 2,400 (■); 4,800 (■); 7,200 (■); 48,000 (■) and 3 x 48,000 ppm (■).	80
Figure 5.1	Postharvest application of plant growth regulator. A small open hole was created in the fruit stem for supplying solution.	91
Figure 5.2	Extractable colour (ASTA unit) of fruit treated with different plant growth regulators (Table 5.1) for 10 days after harvest.	93

Figure 5.3	Internal CO ₂ concentrations (mL L ⁻¹ g ⁻¹) of fruit treated with different plant growth regulators (Table 5.1) for 10 days after harvest.	93
Figure 5.4	TSSC (B ⁰ x) of fruit treated with different plant growth regulators (Table 5.1) for 10 days after harvest.	94
Figure 5.5	The effect of postharvest application of ethephon on colour development of capsicum fruit.	95
Figure 5.6	Change in extractable colour (ASTA unit) of fruit treated with different concentrations of ethephon solution: 0 (■); 2,400 (■); 7,300 (■) and 48,000 (■)..	96
Figure 5.7	Change in chlorophyll content (mg.g ⁻¹ FW) of fruit treated with different concentrations of ethephon solution: 0 (■), 2,400 (■), 7,200 (■) and 48,000 (■).	97
Figure 6.1	Alignment between cDNA for <i>Lcy</i> from <i>Capsicum annuum</i> cv. Yolo wonder (Lcy-X86221-1) and the probe prepared from <i>Capsicum annuum</i> cv. “Papri Queen” using Lc1 and Lc2 primers.	113
Figure 6.2	Alignment between cDNA for <i>Ccs</i> from <i>Capsicum annuum</i> cv. Yolo wonder (CCs-X76165-1) and the probe prepared from <i>Capsicum annuum</i> cv. “Papri Queen” using Cc1 and Cc2 primers.	114
Figure 6.3	<i>Lcy</i> gene expression in fruit from “Papri Queen” ripened on and off the plant.	116
Figure 6.4	<i>Lcy</i> gene expression in fruit treated with preharvest ethephon.	116
Figure 6.5	<i>Lcy</i> gene expression in fruit treated with postharvest ethephon.	116
Figure 6.6	Southern analysis of gDNA for <i>Lcy</i> gene.	117
Figure 6.7	<i>Ccs</i> gene expression in fruit from “Papri Queen” ripened on and off the plant.	119
Figure 6.8	<i>Ccs</i> gene expression in fruit treated with preharvest ethephon.	120
Figure 6.9	<i>Ccs</i> gene expression in fruit treated with postharvest ethephon.	121
Figure 7.1	Ripening behaviour of capsicum fruit on and off the plant and the effect of ethylene.	132

List of Abbreviations

A	absorbance
ABA	abscisic acid
ACC	1-aminocyclopropane-1-carboxylic acid
AOAC	Association of Official Analytical Chemist
ASTA	American Spice Trade Association
B	breaker
BR	breaker red
°C	Degree Celsius
Ccs	capsanthin-capsorubin synthase
CH ₃ COONa	sodium acetate
C ₂ H ₄	ethylene
CO ₂	carbon dioxide
cm	centimetre
DAA	days after anthesis
DAH	days after harvest
DG	deep green
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DR	deep red
DR & D	deep red and partially dried
DW	dry weight
EDTA	ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
ethephon	2-chloroethylphosphonic acid
FW	fresh weight
g	gram
Hepes	4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazine-ethanesulfonic acid
h	hour
HgCl ₂	mercury chloride
i.d.	internal diameter

JA	jasmonic acid
KOH	potassium hydroxide
Lcy	lycopene- β -cyclase
LG	light green
LR	light red
LSD	least significant difference
mg	milligram
mL	millilitre
mm	millimetre
mM	millimole
MOPS	4-morpholinopropanesulfonic acid
NaCl	sodium chloride
NaOCl	sodium hypo chloride
NaOH	sodium hydroxide
Na ₂ HPO ₄	sodium phosphate dibasic
nL	nanolitre
nm	nanometre
NAA	naphthalene acetic acid
PVPP	poly(vinylpyrrolidone)
RNA	ribonucleic acid
s	second
SAM	S-5'- adenosyl methionine
sds	sodium dodecyl sulphate
SE	standard error of the mean
SUC	sucrose
Tris	tris (hydroxymethyl) aminomethane
TSSC	total soluble solid content
UC	University of California (potting mix)
v/v	volume by volume
w/v	weight by volume
μ L	microlitre
μ mol	micromole
%	percent