

BROCCOLI PLANTS OVER-EXPRESSING A CYTOSOLIC ASCORBATE PEROXIDASE GENE INCREASE RESISTANCE TO DOWNY MILDEW AND HEAT STRESS

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SUMMARY

Ascorbate peroxidase (APX) plays an important role in scavenging excessive reactive oxygen species (ROS) produced under environmental stresses, thus protecting plants from oxidative injury. Seven *Brassica oleracea* var. *italica* (broccoli) lines over-expressing *BoAPX* gene were obtained using *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* transformation methods. The *BoAPX* over-expressing plants exhibited significantly higher resistance to *Hyaloperonospora parasitica* infection and heat stress as compared to the wild type broccoli. Among them, our gene over-expressing lines, *oe-apx07*, *oe-apx15*, *oe-apx32* and *oe-apx33*, demonstrated extremely higher enhanced tolerance to downy mildew. In addition, when treated with either *H. parasitica* or high temperature, over-expressed *BoAPX* enzyme activity were both observed in the *oe-apx* lines. These results indicated that over-expressing *BoAPX* gene contributes enhanced tolerance to both downy mildew and heat stress, and *BoAPX* gene plays an essential role in cellular defense against ROS-mediated oxidative damage in broccoli.

Keywords: *Brassica oleracea* var. *italica*, ascorbate peroxidase, APX, downy mildew, heat stress, over-expressing.

INTRODUCTION

Broccoli (*Brassica oleracea* var. *italica*), a member of Cruciferae family, is becoming more popular as a human diet for its high nutritional value as well as a significant source of antioxidants, and its production and consumption have increased dramatically over the past decades (Zhang *et al.*, 2004; Moreno *et al.*, 2006). Broccoli contains rich fiber, potassium, calcium, vitamins, glucosinolates, carotenoids, flavonoids and selenium, and plays important roles

in reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers (Feney *et al.*, 2001; Feney 2003; Matushes *et al.*, 2006; Muherjee *et al.*, 2008). Broccoli is an economically important core vegetable grown in more than 90 countries and consumed around the world (Chang *et al.*, 1998). Downy mildew, caused by *Hyaloperonospora parasitica* (formerly *Peronospora parasitica*), is a worldwide threat to broccoli production, which affects leaves, stems as well as flower heads, resulting in yield and market quality losses (Dicson and Petzoldt, 1993; Jiang *et al.*, 2012a). Broccoli is a cool season crop, with the optimum mean temperature range from 18°C to 25°C (Lin *et al.*, 2010), so besides the downy mildew, heat stress is also considered a threat to broccoli production, which causes rapid wilting of sepals, purple buds, oozing and vascular necrosis and early flower heads (Heather *et al.*, 1992; Farnham and Björman, 2011).

Both pathogen attack and heat stress induce production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) which include hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), superoxide anion (O₂⁻), singlet oxygen (¹O₂), and hydroxyl radicals (OH[•]). Under normal conditions, ROS, generated as by-products of cellular metabolism, is necessary for cell proliferation, signaling, growth and development (Foreman *et al.*, 2003; Mittler *et al.*, 2011). However, excessive ROS will seriously disrupt normal plant metabolism by causing oxidative damage to membrane lipids, proteins, and nucleic acids (Fridovich *et al.*, 1986; Rashad and Hussien, 2014). Fortunately, antioxidant defense mechanisms, including enzymatic and nonenzymatic antioxidants, have evolved for scavenging or detoxification of excessive ROS under stress conditions (Hanuoglu *et al.*, 2006). The enzymatic antioxidants include peroxidase (POD), ascorbic acid oxidase (AAO), polyphenol oxidase (PPO), catalase (CAT), glutathione peroxidase (GPX), superoxide dismutase (SOD), ascorbate peroxidase (APX), and glutathione reductase (GR) (Noctor and Foyer, 1998; Bohana *et al.*, 2003; G and Tuteja, 2010; Caverzan *et al.*, 2012; So *et al.*, 2015). Among them, APX (EC 1.11.1.11) is an important enzyme for metabolism of H₂O₂, and thus increases stability of membranes and prevents cellular injury (Yoshimura *et al.*, 2000). Transgenic plants including *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Arabidopsis thaliana*, *Oryza sativa*

et al., 2001; Sarowar *et al.*, 2005; Wang *et al.*, 2005; Sato *et al.*, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2011).

In our previous study, a cytosolic ascorbate peroxidase gene, designated *BoAPX* (GenBank accession No. HQ871864), was isolated from *B. oleracea* var. *italica*. *BoAPX* is orthologous to known APXs in *B. rapa* ssp. *pekinensis* (GQ500125), *B. napus* (Y11461) and *Raphanus sativus* (X78452). RT-PCR results indicated that the expression of *BoAPX* was induced by *Hyaloperonospora parasitica*, implying its probable function in downy mildew resistance. The gene was transferred into vector pBI121 driven by the constitutive cauliflower mosaic virus 35S promoter (CaMV 35S) with *nptII* as a selectable marker gene (Jiang *et al.*, 2012b).

Downy mildew and high temperature are two major factors affecting plant growth and development. APX may play an increasingly important role in dealing with both biotic and abiotic stresses. Here we investigated the biological function of *BoAPX* during plant development. Transgenic lines over-expressing *BoAPX* were generated and the results indicated that over-expression of *BoAPX* gene increased tolerance to both downy mildew and heat stress, reflecting its possible function in cellular defense against ROS-mediated oxidative damage in broccoli.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plant material. A broccoli (*Brassica oleracea* var. *italica*) inbred line, Bo113, was used. The seeds were surface sterilized with 70% (v/v) ethanol solution for 5 min, and then soaked in 0.1% HgCl₂ for 6 min, followed by 5 rinses with sterile double-distilled water. The seeds were sowed on Murashige and Skoog (MS) medium, and were then cultured at 25 ± 1°C with a 16 h light and 8 h dark photoperiod in the plant growth room in the College of Life Science of Taizhou University.

Agrobacterium transformation. The recombinant plasmid pBI121-*BoAPX* and empty vector PBI121 (control) were introduced into *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* strain LBA4404, respectively. For genetic transformation, stems from 15-day old seedlings were cut into 1.0 cm length segments and inoculated with *A. tumefaciens* cells carrying the recombinant plasmid. The pre- and co-culture mediums were MS supplemented with 0.02 mg/l naphthaleneacetic acid (NAA), 4.0 mg/l 6-benzylaminopurine (6-BA), and 5.0 mg/l AgNO₃. The shoot induction medium was MS plus 0.02 mg/l NAA, 4.0 mg/l 6-BA, 4.0 mg/l AgNO₃ and 50.0 mg/l anamycin. Shoots were rooted in MS containing both 0.2 mg/l NAA and 50.0 mg/l anamycin (Jiang *et al.*, 2012a).

PCR confirmation of transgenic plants. Genomic DNA was isolated by using CTAB method (Doye and Doye, 1987). Primer pairs of NPTUP

(TGCTCGACGTTGTCCTG) and NPTDN (GCATCGCCATGGGTCAC) were designed to amplify a fragment of the selectable marker gene *nptII*, and the primer pairs of BoUP1 (AGGACCTAACAGAACTCGC) and BoDN1 (CCAGGGTGGAAAGGAATCTCA) were used to amplify part of the sequences of 35S promoter and *BoAPX* gene, respectively. PCR reaction mixture consisted of 30 ng of gDNA, 200 mM of each dNTP, 20 pmol primers, 1.2 U of Taq DNA polymerase (Promega, USA), 2 μl PCR buffer, and 40 mM MgCl₂ in total volume of 20 μl. PCR amplification was carried out in B o-Rad C1000 Thermal Cycler with 32 cycles of 95°C (35 s), 50.5°C (45 s) and 72°C (60 s), and a final extension of 72°C for 10 min. PCR products were separated on 1.2% agarose gel containing 0.5 μg/ml ethidium bromide.

Disease assessment. Plants of seven *BoAPX* over-expressing lines were propagated using stems as explants and transplanted into climatic chambers. Six plants of each line were used. The type of downy mildew strain used for the inoculation was Bo hp23. Spore suspensions were prepared by washing the conidia on the leaf surface, and 0.2 ml suspensions (approximately 1 × 10⁵ spores per micro-liter) containing 0.01% (v/v) Tween 20 were sprayed onto each side of leaves. The control plants were treated with equal amount of ddH₂O with 0.01% (v/v) Tween 20. The plants were cultured in the cabinet at 16°C to maintain cool and damp (RH 80%) conditions with 16 h/8 h light/dark cycles. Leaf samples were harvested 0 DAI (days after inoculation), 1 DAI, 3 DAI and 5 DAI, and were then washed and dried on tissue paper. All samples were stored at -80°C for APX enzyme assays. Five days after inoculation, disease assessment was carried out by using a scale (0, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9) in which zero corresponded to neither necrotic cells nor sporulation on leaf surface, and

uor de), and 20% (w/v) sorbitol (Shen *et al.*, 2001). For each treatment, six plants were used. The homogenate was centrifuged at 13000g and 4°C for 30 min, and the supernatants were collected for enzyme assays. The APX enzyme activity assay was performed in a reaction mixture containing 50 mM potassium phosphate (pH 7.0), 0.1 mM EDTA, 1 mM H₂O₂, 1.5 mM ascorbate, and 50 µl of the crude enzyme extracts. The value of absorbance at 290 nm was recorded at 80 s after the addition of H₂O₂, and the concentration was calculated according to the molar extinction coefficient of ascorbate oxidized per minute ($E=2.8\text{ mM/cm}$) (Nakano and Asada, 1981; Lin *et al.*, 2010).

Electrical conductivity measurement. Six discs of 6 mm diameter were punched out of each sample and immersed in test tubes with 15 ml distilled water, and then were placed in a 25°C water bath for 24 h. The total conductivity (EC_1) was measured using a DDS-11A conductivity meter. The test tubes were then kept in a boiling water bath for 30 min, and cooled to 25°C for a final conductivity determination (EC_2). The relative EC value (%) was calculated as $EC_1/EC_2 \times 100\%$ (Apostolova *et al.*, 2008).

Statistical analysis. Comparisons between wild type and transgenic broccoli plants were performed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and least significant difference (LSD) test (Tang and Zhang, 2013).

RESULTS

PCR detection of transgenic plants. To determine the biological function of the *BoAPX* gene, *BoAPX* driven by CaMV 35S promoter was transformed into broccoli wild type plants. A total of seven over-express transgenic lines, namely *oe-apx07*, *oe-apx15*, *oe-apx22*, *oe-apx27*, *oe-apx32*, *oe-apx33* and *oe-apx49*, were screened out of 63 regenerated plantlets by using anamycosis, and they were later confirmed by PCR. Amplification products of the *nptII* gene were observed in both WT and transgenic plants, however, the fragments of part a 35S promoter and *BoAPX* were present only in those transgenic lines, and no band was observed in the WT line (Fig. 1).

Assessment of downy mildew resistance. Enough transgenic broccoli plants were generated using tissue culture method. Reaction phenotypes were assigned, and disease indices were calculated (Table 1). The control plants exhibited a susceptible reaction with disease index of 6.95, while the over-express lines showed different resistance classes, from LR to VR. Necrotic lesions, chlorosis, and heavy sporulation were observed on leaves of wild type plants which was downy mildew susceptible as we demonstrated previously. Necrotic lesions as well as sparse sporulation were presented on the leaves of *oe-apx22* with disease index of 5.10. *Oe-apx27* and *oe-apx49* were two

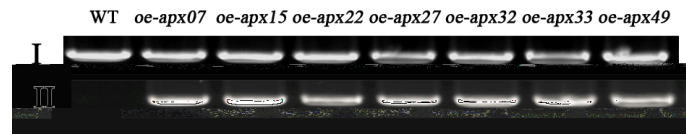


Fig. 1. PCR detection of transgenic plants. I: PCR detection of *nptII* gene in both WT and transgenic lines; II: PCR detection of part a sequences of 35S promoter and *BoAPX* gene; WT: the control plant with empty vector; *oe-apx07*, *oe-apx15*, *oe-apx22*, *oe-apx27*, *oe-apx32*, *oe-apx33* and *oe-apx49*: *BoAPX* over-express lines.

Table 1. Evaluation of downy mildew interaction-phenotype classes of broccoli transgenic lines.

Lines	Interaction-phenotype class ¹						Plants tested	Disease index ²	Resistance class ³
	0	1	3	5	7	9			
WT	–	–	–	27	44	25	96	6.95 Aa	S
<i>oe-apx07</i>	–	32	35	29	–	–	96	2.94 De	VR
<i>oe-apx15</i>	38	35	23	–	–	–	96	1.08 Fg	VR
<i>oe-apx22</i>	–	–	23	45	28	–	96	5.10 Bb	LR
<i>oe-apx27</i>	–	13	51	32	–	–	96	3.40 Cd	MR
<i>oe-apx32</i>	22	32	35	7	–	–	96	1.79 E	VR
<i>oe-apx33</i>	–	31	38	26	1	–	96	2.94 De	VR
<i>oe-apx49</i>	–	3	32	35	26	–	96	4.75 Bc	MR

¹0=no necrotic lesions, no sporulation; 1=slight necrotic lesions, no sporulation; 3=necrotic lesions, one to few sporangia; 5=necrotic lesions, sparse scattered sporulation usually confined to necrotic areas; 7=necrotic lesions, sometimes with accompanying chlorosis, scattered, heavy to abundant sporulation in both chlorotic and necrotic areas; 9=necrosis and some chlorosis may be evident, uniformly heavy sporulation over abaxial surface of leaf.

²Values with different over/uppercase letters are significantly different at $P<0.05/P<0.01$ according to LSD's test, respectively.

³Resistance classes based on disease indices (DI) calculated by Williams' formula: VR (very resistant), $DI=0-3.0$; MR (moderately resistant), $DI=3.1-5.0$; LR (low resistance), $DI=5.1-6.0$; S (susceptible), $DI=6.1-7.0$; VS (very susceptible), $DI=7.1-9.0$.

moderately resistant lines with disease indices of 3.40 and 4.75, respectively, and necrotic lesions and few sporangia were observed on the leaves. Interestingly, our lines, *oe-apx07*, *oe-apx15*, *oe-apx32* and *oe-apx33*, showed a very high degree of resistance to downy mildew with disease indices of 2.94, 1.08, 1.79 and 2.94, respectively. No necrotic lesions or sporulation was detected on leaves of *oe-apx15* (Fig. 2).

Leaves of WT and seven over-express lines were used for APX enzyme activity assay. Comparing with the control plants, the APX enzyme activity was higher in all the *BoAPX* over-express lines at 0 DAI, which were probably due to *BoAPX* over-express. When challenged with *H. parasitica*, both the control and over-express plants exhibited increased APX enzyme activity at 1 and 3 DAI, and decreased at 5 DAI. Compared with the control plants, all the over-express lines showed higher enzyme activity at 1 and 3 DAI. A maximum

was observed at 3 DAI in the *oe-apx15* with the value at 15.10 ± 0.23 U/g FW, which was twice more than the control at the same time point (Table 2).

Assessment of electrical conductivity. The leaves of the control and over-expressing plants were sprayed with *H. parasitica* and prepared for electrical conductivity (REC) measurement. REC values were determined from 0

Table 2. Effect of *Hyaloperonospora parasitica* on APX enzyme activity in leaves of transgenic broccoli plants (U/g FW).

Broccoli lines	Days after inoculation ¹			
	0 d	1 d	3 d	5 d
WT	5.13±0.12 Cc	6.36±0.35 Gg	6.63±0.32 F	4.52±0.34 Dc
<i>oe-apx07</i>	7.54±0.43 Aa	10.74±0.47 Bb	12.15±0.93 Cc	7.41±0.11 Cb
<i>oe-apx15</i>	7.30±0.17 Aa	12.50±0.42 Aa	15.10±0.23 Aa	7.70±0.41 BCb
<i>oe-apx22</i>	6.36±0.27 Bb	7.10±0.34 FG	8.66±0.12 Ee	7.52±0.28 Cb
<i>oe-apx27</i>	7.71±0.26 Aa	8.54±0.38 DEd	10.33±0.21 Dd	8.34±0.19 ABa
<i>oe-apx32</i>	7.63±0.21 Aa	9.33±0.28 CDc	13.45±0.29 Bb	8.72±0.22 Aa
<i>oe-apx33</i>	7.63±0.41 Aa	9.74±0.49 Cc	12.04±0.45 Cc	8.29±0.45 ABa
<i>oe-apx49</i>	6.58±0.19 Bb	7.81±0.22 EFe	9.58±0.41 DEd	7.52±0.25 Cb

¹Mean values±standard errors are shown (n=6).Different overcase and uppercase letters indicate significant differences among broccoli lines at $p<0.05$ and $p<0.01$, respectively.**Table 3.** The relative electrical conductivity (%) change in leaves after spray of *Hyaloperonospora parasitica* in the over-express and control plants of broccoli.

Broccoli lines	Days after inoculation ¹			
	0 d	1 d	3 d	5 d
WT	21.00±0.61 Aa	34.18±2.35 Aa	56.34±1.94 Aa	73.45±4.98 Aa
<i>oe-apx07</i>	17.89±0.56 BCbcd	27.95±1.00 Bb	42.64±0.44 Bb	54.74±2.11 Bb
<i>oe-apx15</i>	16.97±0.58 Cd	20.17±1.42 Dd	27.05±1.23 Ee	43.79±1.24 Cc
<i>oe-apx22</i>	18.70±0.50 Bb	27.54±1.25 BCb	38.36±1.69 Cc	42.55±0.63 Cc
<i>oe-apx27</i>	17.96±0.46 BCbcd	24.53±1.38 Cc	33.89±1.52 Dd	51.30±1.21 Bb
<i>oe-apx32</i>	17.22±0.62 Ccd	21.15±0.73 Dd	31.81±1.15 Dd	44.70±2.25 Cc
<i>oe-apx33</i>	17.92±0.75 BCbcd	32.93±1.43 Aa	33.15±0.84 Dd	42.66±0.90 Cc
<i>oe-apx49</i>	18.06±0.61 BCbc	27.07±0.34 BCb	33.55±1.30 Dd	44.18±1.40 Cc

¹Mean values±standard errors are shown (n=6).Different overcase and uppercase letters indicate significant differences among broccoli lines at $p<0.05$ and $p<0.01$, respectively.**Table 4.** The assessment of APX enzyme activity in broccoli leaves under heat stress (U/g FW).

Broccoli lines	Days after heat stress ¹			
	0 d	1 d	3 d	5 d
WT	5.17±0.16 Bc	7.27±0.17 Ed	5.47±0.35 Ee	4.41±0.30 De
<i>oe-apx07</i>	7.46±0.40 Aab	10.53±0.39 Aa	12.05±0.51 Aa	8.67±0.62 Aab
<i>oe-apx15</i>	7.70±0.27 Aa	9.22±0.21 Bb	11.56±0.39 Aa	7.43±0.18 BCc
<i>oe-apx22</i>	6.58±0.40 Ab	7.55±0.39 DEd	9.37±0.27 BCb	8.47±0.44 ABab
<i>oe-apx27</i>	7.40±0.42 Aab	8.51±0.42 BCc	9.45±0.38 BCb	9.16±0.41 Aa
<i>oe-apx32</i>	7.63±0.44 Aa	8.29±0.33 CDc	8.57±0.31 CDc	8.13±0.51 ABbc
<i>oe-apx33</i>	7.41±0.23 Aab	8.55±0.39 BCc	9.51±0.43 Bb	7.44±0.39 BCc
<i>oe-apx49</i>	6.76±0.10 Aab	8.45±0.29 BCc	7.81±0.14 Dd	6.63±0.43 Cd

¹Mean values±standard errors are shown (n=6).Different overcase and uppercase letters indicate significant differences among broccoli lines at $p<0.05$ and $p<0.01$, respectively.**Table 5.** The relative electrical conductivity (%) change in leaves under heat stress in the over-express and control plants of broccoli.

Broccoli lines	Days after heat stress ¹			
	0 d	1 d	3 d	5 d
WT	20.97±0.62 Aa	28.02±0.77 ABab	44.40±0.79 Aa	69.70±0.45 Aa
<i>oe-apx07</i>	17.83±0.65 BCbcd	24.21±0.96 CDcd	37.49±1.35 Cc	45.32±0.87 Bb
<i>oe-apx15</i>	16.96±0.58 Cd	23.36±0.55 Dd	27.36±0.54 F	39.23±0.61 E
<i>oe-apx22</i>	18.67±0.68 Bb	30.36±1.35 Aa	34.46±1.36 Dd	43.08±0.11 Cc
<i>oe-apx27</i>	17.89±0.59 BCbcd	26.32±1.68 BCbc	34.22±0.34 Dd	41.82±0.56 CDde
<i>oe-apx32</i>	17.19±0.61 BCcd	22.95±0.58 Dd	39.67±0.58 Bb	42.17±0.95 CDcd
<i>oe-apx33</i>	17.88±0.52 BCbcd	29.56±0.40 Aa	34.83±0.85 Dd	42.15±0.56 CDede
<i>oe-apx49</i>	18.15±0.55 BCbc	22.55±0.94 Dd	31.10±0.87 Ee	40.92±0.93 DEe

¹Mean values±standard errors are shown (n=6). Different overcase and uppercase letters indicate significant differences among broccoli lines at $p<0.05$ and $p<0.01$, respectively.

Environmental stresses disrupt metabolic balance of cells, resulting in enhanced production of ROS. Detoxification of ROS needs more antioxidants. Over-expression of *APX* genes increases APX enzyme activity and improves ROS scavenging ability. Over-expression of *LetAPX* enhanced resistance to chilling stress in tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*) (Duan *et al.*, 2012). A *cAPX* gene from pea (*Pisum sativum*) was introduced into tomato. The transformed lines were proved to be chilling and salt stress tolerant, and the APX activity in transgenic plants was severally higher than that in the control plants (Wang *et al.*, 2005). Over-expression of a *Lycium chinense cAPX* gene in tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum* cv. *SR-1*) showed higher APX activity and enhanced salt tolerance (Wu *et al.*, 2014). In our study, significant higher level of APX enzyme activity was detected in over-expressing lines, and all the transformed broccoli plants demonstrated increasing disease resistance and heat tolerance. Whether under downy mildew inoculation/heat stress or not, APX activity was much higher in transgenic lines than that in WT plants. In addition, different enzyme activity in the over-expressing plants were observed when challenged by downy mildew or high temperature, especially in *oe-apx07* and *oe-apx15* lines which improved downy mildew and heat stress caused ROS accumulation in plants, and *BoAPX* over-expression improved ROS scavenging ability (Guan *et al.*, 2015).

REC is regarded as an effective indicator for cellular membrane injury caused by oxidative stress, during the

su 56 (e)eu(o)14. a30.5 (6)11.1 1pp e6vao-8.3 (R)15.m8-21.7 (n)a5a6-25.75 (1.1 (o-8.3 ()17.6 ()-39.5 ()2)13 (t)-99.8 ()81.1 (o-8.

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