ACTA SCIENTIARUM POLONORUM

Acta Sci. Pol. Hortorum Cultus, 16(1) 2017, 85–93

www.acta.media.pl ISSN 1644-0692

ORIGINAL PAPER

Accepted: 20.09.2016

REGENERATION CAPACITY OF *Asparagus setaceus* (Kunth) Jessop 'PYRAMIDALIS' IN in vitro CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Plant regeneration through the tissue culture techniques would be a excellent alternative for improving the quality and faster production of *Asparagus* species. The number of reports on application of biotechnological methods (such as direct organogenesis, indirect organogenesis and somatic embriogenesis) for ornamental asparagus are scarce in comparison to edible asparagus. The aim of this study was to verify the effectiveness of chemical and physical factors on organogenetic response of *Asparagus setaceus* 'Pyramidalis' explants. The results showed that nodes cultured on MS medium supplemented on IAA (1.71 μM) and BA (13.32 μM) gave highest number of shoots per explant (14 – in the fourth passage). Rhizogenesis were achieved on MS medium with IBA (2.45 μM) and ancymidol (2.88 μM). Finally, 90% of rooted shoots (microcuttings) survived. The fastest increase in callus tissue on internodal explants were observed on MS medium with addition of TDZ (9.08 μM) and adenine sulphate (10.86 μM).

Key words: ornamental asparagus, micropropagation, callogenesis

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Asparagus* contains more than 200 species, found as herbaceous perennials, tender woody, shrubs and vines, and some of them are used as vegetable plants (the most economically important is garden asparagus – *A. officinalis* and also *A. maritimus* and *A. acutifolius* are know to be used in same diets), medicinal plants (e.g. *A. racemosus*, *A. verticillastrum*) and as ornamental plants (*A. densiflorus*, *A. setaceus*, *A. asparagoides*, *A. falcatus*). *Asparagus* is now the main genus of the Asparagaceae belonging to Asparagales [Dahlgren et al. 1985]. The latest infrageneric classification divides *Asparagus* into three subgenera: *Asparagus*, *Protoasparagus* and *Myrsiphyllum* [Kanno and Yokoyama 2011]. The subgenus *Asparagus* is monophyletic and the degree of genetic differentiation among *Asparagus* species is small, even though these species are morphological diverse.

A. setaceus (synonyms: *A. setacea*, *A. plumosus*, *Protoasparagus plumosus*, *P. setaceus*) commonly called Asparagus Fern, Lace Fern, Climbing Asparagus or Fern Asparagus is used as ornamental plant. Originally described by the German botanist Karl Sigismund Kunth, its specific name is derived from the Latin *saeta* "hair" or "bristle", hence "hairy" [Simpson 1979]. The lack of clearly defined taxa has given rise to different classifications of *Asparagus* species [Štajner et al. 2002]. *A. setaceus* is a scrambling perennial herb with stiff green stems, the leaf-like cladodes up to 7 mm long by 0.1 mm in diameter making green fern-like foliage. The flowers are greenish-white bell-shaped and are followed by small

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green berries, which blacken with maturity, and are toxic [Baker 1875].

Wild relative species in the genus *Asparagus* have many agricultural traits, such as salt tolerance, drought tolerance, acid soil tolerance and disease resistance. Among others *A. setaceus* is resistant to *Stemphyllum* leaf spot [Bansal et al. 1986] and rust caused by *Puccinia asparagi* [Kahn et al. 1952 cit. after Kanno and Yokoyama 2011]. Some researchers reported interspecific hand-pollinated crossing among *A. officinalis* × *A. setaceus* [Kahn et al. 1952 cit. after Kanno and Yokoyama 2011] and *A. setaceus* × *A. densiflorus* [McCollum 1988] but unsuccessful.

Asparagus setaceus (Knuth) Jessop is cultivated as an ornamental plant in two cultivars 'Pyramidalis' (lose pyramidalis habitas) and 'Nanus' (dwarf habitas) and is the popular addition to unusual combination of bouquets. It is propagated by seeds – but this method is inefficient and vegetative propagation has proven slow and practically it is impossible on a large scale [Yang 1977]. Therefore we are looking a more sophisticated methods e. g. *in vitro* culture which offers an unlimited production of clones and gives possibility to transfer and express in plant genes from any sources. *A. officinalis* was the first plant to be regenerated from tissue culture in monocotyledonous plants [Loo 1945, 1946]. In comparison to numerous works on application of biotechnological methods for edible asparagus for ornamental asparagus reports are scare. To date there have only been a few reports on micropropagation of *A. setaceus* syn. *A. plumosus* [Ghosh and Sen 1994 cit. after Regalado et al. 2015, Fonnesbech et al. 1977 a, b, Pindel 2000, Regalado et al. 2015].

The paper presents results of research on the effectiveness of different chemical and physical factors for organogenesis and callus proliferation of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis'. To my knowledge, this is the first report for *in vitro* culture of this cultivar, therefore preliminary studies were performed in which the kind of explant, types and concentrations of auxins and cytokinins (used separately or together in a medium) were tested. Effect of sucrose concentration, addition of ancymidol and light or dark conditions on differentiation processes has also been studied. Based on these results, was to establish an efficient *in vitro* shoot culture of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis'.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Culture media and conditions

In preliminary studies the basal media MS [Murashige and Skoog 1962] or LS [Linsmayer and Skoog 1965], types and concentration of growth regulators – auxins: IAA (3-Indoleacetic acid), 2,4-D (2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid), NAA (1-naphtaleneacetic acid), Dicamba (3,6-dichloro-2--methoxybenzoic acid), IBA (indole-3-butyric acid), Picloram (4-amino-3,5,6-trichloropyridine-2-carboxylic acid) and cytokinins: kinetin (6-furfuryladenine), BA (6-benzylaminopurine), adenine sulphate salt (6-aminopuryne sulphate salt), TDZ (thidiazuron) – separately and together. All media was supplemented with three different concentration of sucrose and of ancymidol (α-cyclopropyl-α-(4-mthoxy- phenyl)-5-pyrimidinene thanol). The effect of light or darkness and kind of gelling agents (Difco agar or Phytagel™) on spears and root explants were likewise tested (tab. 1). Results of these experiments were used to determine the best conditions of *in vitro* propagation of *Asparagu setaceus* Kunth (Jessop) 'Pyramidalis' nodal explants (as described below). Evocative scoring method was used. Depending on the response to the agent (factors) assigned the appropriate number of points (the explanation given in Table 1).

Based on the results of pilot studies the variants of the highest scoring were selected. For caulogenesis were chosen MS medium supplemented with IAA (1.71 μM) – MI, IAA (1.71 μM) + BA (13.32 μM) that is, the weight ratio of auxin to cytokinin as 1 to 10 – MII, both with addition 88 mM sucrose, 0.8% of Difco agar and light conditions. The rooting media were supplemented with IBA (2.46 μM) without – M1 or with addition of ancymidol (2.88 μM) – M2. Media for callus initiation contained 2,4-D (9.05 μM) – MA, 2,4-D (9.05 μM) + adenine sulphate (10.86 μM) – MB and TDZ (9.08 μM) + adenine sulphate (10.86 μM) – MC and as gelling agent Phytagel™. This part of experiment was conducted in the dark.

Nodal culture

This experiments was carried out using young stems (know as spears) as explants. Nodal segments

Table 1. The morphogenetical response of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis' to different chemical and physical factors for *in vitro* MS or LS medium

Explant/Factor	Concentration in MS/LS mediumμM	Process	Number of points*/ selectedsymbol
Ex vivo spears (nodes/internodes)			
Auxins			
IAA	1.71	caulogenesis	2 / MI
2,4-D	4.52; 9.05	callogenesis	3 / MA
NAA	0.54; 2.69; 5.37	rhizogenesis	0.5
Dicamba	4.52; 22.62; 45.25	callogenesis	0.5
IBA	2.46	rhizogenesis	1 / M1
Picloram	8.28	vary weak callogenesis	0
Cytokinins			
Kinetin	4.65	caulogenesis – initiation stage	0.5
BA	0.88; 4.44; 13.32; 17.74	caulogenesis	2 (at a concentration 17.74)
Adenine sulphate	10.86	improves callus phenotype	2
TDZ	9.08	the higher % of callogenesis, but callus hard and compact	1
Auxin + cytokinin			
IAA + Kinetin	1.71 + 4.65	caulogenesis	1
IAA + BA	1.71 + 0.88	caulogenesis	1
	1.71 + 4.44	caulogenesis	1
	1.71 + 13.32	caulogenesis	3 / MII
	1.71 + 17.74	caulogenesis	2
2,4-D + adenine sulphate	4.52 + 10.86	callogenesis	2
	9.05 + 10.86	callogenesis	3 / MB
NAA + kinetin	0.54 + 4.65	rhizogenesis	0.5
	2.69 + 4.65	rhizogenesis	0.5
	5.37 + 4.65	rhizogenesis	0.5
NAA + BA	2.69 + 17.74	rhizogenesis	0.5
	5.37 + 4.44	rhizogenesis	0.5
TDZ + adenine sulphate	9.08 + 10.86	callogenesis	2 / MC
Ancymidol	2.88	deformation of explants (in the initiation medium)	0
		shortening the time of rhizogenesis (in the rooting medium)	1
IBA + ancymidol	2.46 + 2.88		1 / M2

Table 1. Cont.

Sucrose	2% (59 mM)	callogenesis	1
	3% (88 mM)	organogenesis and callogenesis	1
	4% (118 mM)	magnification of explants and initiation of abnormal distorted shoots	0
Light/darkness		callus formation and further growth was stimulated by darkness	3
		shoots were initiated on the light	2
Agar Difco	0.8%	organogenesis (shoots than roots)	2
		weaker effect of callogenesis	1
Phytagel™	0.3%	development ofembriogenic callus	2
Roots (2–3 mm transverse slices)		lack ofmorphogenetical responses to all tested chemical and physical factors	0

* Evocative score:
0 – no morphogenetical response (no reaction)
0.5 – weak reaction (single explants with shoots, roots or callus)
1 – single shoots, roots or callus initiation at approximately 50% of explants
2 – shoots, roots or callus in over 50% of explants
3 – more than 1 shoot or root and intensively growing callus on most of the explants

(ca 2 mm long) were excised from 6–8 cm long spears of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis' plants growing in a greenhouse (primary explant). Spears were surface sterilized in 70% (v/v) ethanol, followed by immersion in 0.1% solution of $HgCl_2$ for 2–3 min and washed with sterile distilled water five times. Five explants were placed horizontally on the tested media (MI and MII) in each of ten Erlenmeyer flask and cultured in light conditions (80 μmol $m^{-2} \cdot s^{-1}$ provided by fluorescent light in a 16/8 h photoperiod) at 22°C. Every four weeks, explants in the aggregate were passaged on fresh medium. Healthy, 3–4 cm long excised shoots were transferred into rooting medium (M1 and M2). For acclimatization regenerated plantlets were removed from culture vessels and their roots were washed of the attached medium in running water and transferred to pots containing sterile soil (peaetmoss and perlite 1:1) and maintained in a humid (ca 80 %) and shady environment.

Callus induction

In this part of experiments two kinds of explants were taken from juvenile (*in vitro* regenerated shoots – secondary explants) and from *in vivo* (in greenhouse) growing plants (primary explants). The internodes were cut vertically into 1–2 mm thick slices and cultured on callus induction media (MA, MB and MC) in the dark conditions. Explants were transferred into fresh media every 4 weeks.

For each treatment five replications were prepared, one replication consisted of four Erlenmeyer flask (five explants were placed in each of vessel). Only the results of the second phase of experiments were verified statistically with the Student's t-test (significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 summarized the preliminary studies results which were conducted for selection of explants and culture conditions used in the following experiment. Data in the tab. 1 indicate that only shoots explants of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis' showed morphogenetical response, explants from roots failed – did not proliferate in any of the combinations used throughout the experiment. It be noted that were no significant differences between MS and LS media components (data not shown). IAA, BA and Kinetin

singly stimulated shoot formation, but the combination IAA with BA was found to be most effective for shoots production. The choice of the source of the explant from the mother plant of *Asparagus* species is relatively simple and is determined according to the goals. *Asparagus* belonging to the sclerophytes show a reduction in evaporating surface area, they are leafless and have spherical stems modified to perform the functions normally ascribed to leaves – cladodes. Shoots (spears) can be a source of adventitious buds (nodal explants), parenchyma tissue ability to the regenerate buds and roots directly or indirectly via callus. Comparative anatomy of stem and root of some *Asparagus* species [Nawaz et al. 2012] have shown significant differences among ground tissue, sub-epidermal layers, vascular bundles and sclerenchyma tissue among all species. This results in other response different genotypes to *in vitro* conditions. Already Rastogi and Sawheny [1989] noted that various factors in *in vitro* cultures (e.g. PGR levels and ratios, nutritional requirements, temperature and light) must be studied separately for each given species or even cultivar. The preliminary experiments showed that for rooting of regenerated shoots auxin IBA was the best and the addition of ancymidol reduced time of rooting. Callus tissue proliferated on the media supplemented with auxin 2,4-D or cytokinin TDZ, and addition of adenine sulphate improve callus phenotype. *A. setaceus* is highly salt tolerant [Bezona et al. 2009] and height concentration of nitrogen promoted their vegetative growth [Ziv and Naor 2006] but any changes in other components lead to differences in morphogenetical response – which is confirmed by this study (as seen in table 1).

Nodal culture

Based on the results presented in Table 1 nodal culture were conducted on the selected media MI and MII. On the MI medium the nodes have shown single and on MII multiple shoot formation (fig. 1). These shoots on subculture grew and branched. IAA singly (MI) showed week multiplication coefficient (average 1–2 shoots per node, phot. 1) whereas a combination of IAA and BA was found to be effective in multiplying adventitious shoots. This trend was observed up to four successive cultures when, after 16 weeks, 14 new shoots per explant were recorded. Similarly, Kar and Sen [1965] observed that IAA + BA in the ratio 1:10 was affected shoots development (12/expl) in *A. racemosus*. In contrary Pant and Joshi [2009] reported that NAA at many of the concentration (0.54, 2.69, 5.37, 10.74 μM) either singly or in combinations with cytokinins is effective in the shoot induction.

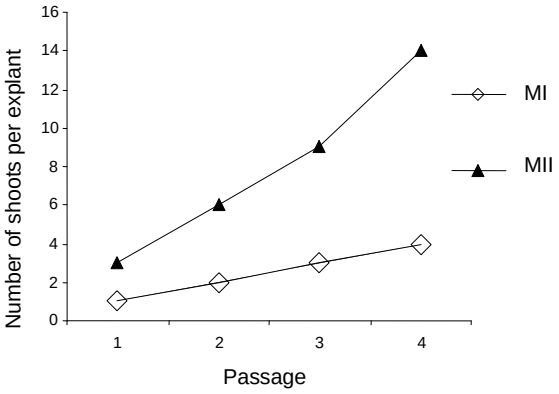
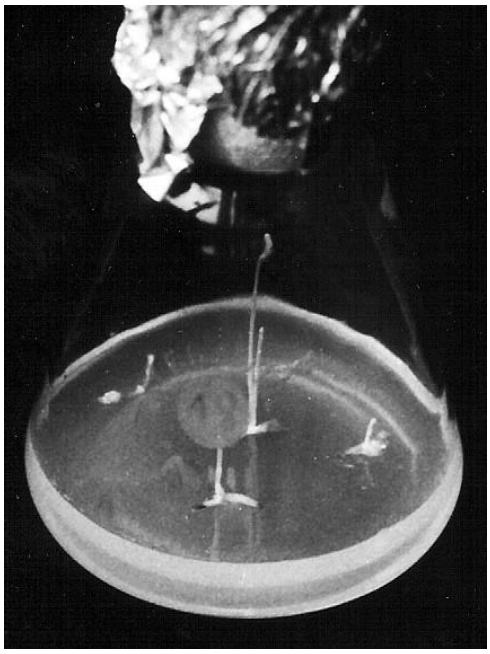


Fig. 1. The effect of growth regulators in MS medium on the number of shoots formation of nodal explants of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis'.Medium MI contained: IAA (1.71 μM), MII: IAA (1.71 μM) + BA (13.32 μM)

The results of average number of roots on the excised microshoots and roots regeneration percentage (%) were given in Figure 2. As seen addition of ancymidol (in M2) increased rooting, almost twice, and number of roots per explant (to about 5). Ancymidol, a gibberelic acid synthesis inhibitor, has been used in culture medium to improve *A. officinalis* rooting frequency [Chang and Peng 1996], and somatic embryo production and germination [Li and Wolyn 1997, Ziv 2005]. Based on the preliminary study media was supplemented with 88 mM sucrose and 0.8% Difco agar. Present results are in agreement with those reported by Desjardins et al. [1987], Štajner et al. [2002] and Mehta and Subramanian [2005]. The mean number of roots on medium without ancymidol is similarly to present study (fig. 2).

Kar and Sen [1985] reported that root induction was supported by IAA (max. 4 roots/shoots) and Mehta and Subramanian [2005] by IBA + ancymidol (an average 5.7 roots/shoot) of *A. racemosus* and *A. adscedens* respectively. But in the present study the percentage of rooted shoots (ranged between 1 and 10 depending on the culture medium) was significantly lower than in the works of *A. racemosus* (70%) and *A. adscedens* (69%).



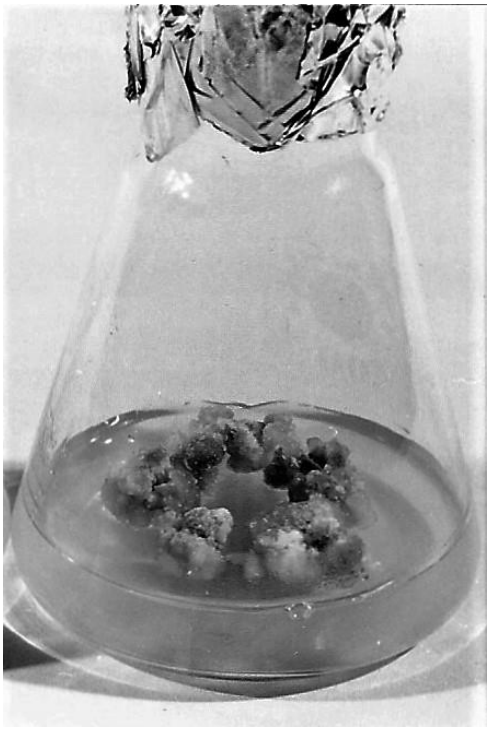
Phot. 1. Initiation of shoots from nodal explants on MS medium supplemented with 1.71 μM IAA (MI)

Rhizogenesis in asparagus is usually more difficult than caulogenesis and multiplication process. Several authors have pointed out that the major obstacle of Asparagus micropropagation protocols is root initiation [Sarabi and Almasi 2010]. Many genotypes are recalcitrant to adventitious root formations [Araki et al. 1996]. Ren et al. [2012] reported that among different factors affecting *in vitro* rooting, genotype and cultivar are of prime importance.

At the final developmental stage of acclimatization the successful gradually acclimatized percentage reached to 90% of rooted shoots. Similarly, high survival rate obtained for *A. recemosus*. Patel and Patel [2015] reported 75% survival rate in the field conditions and Kar and Sen [1985] 70% survival rate in pots containing sandy soil and humus.

Callus induction

To compare the *in vitro* responses of mature and juvenille tissue in this part of experiment primary (*ex vivo*) and secondary (*ex vitro*) material were taken. The selection of explant at a specific responsive stage is the important factor in overcoming in *in vitro* re calcitrance especially in perennial plants [Benson 2000]. Figure 3 show that in any cases secondary



Phot. 2. Close view of callus on MS medium supplemented with 9.08 μM TDZ and 10.86 μM adenine sulphate – MC (after 3 months of culture)

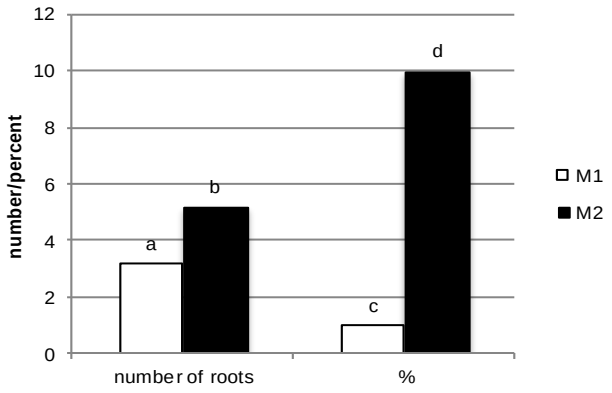


Fig. 2. The effect of ancymidol on rooting *A. setaceus*' Pyramidalis' shoots and onpercentage on rooted shoots. Medium M1 contained: IBA (2.46 μM), M2: IBA (2.46 μM) + ancymidol (2.88 μM)

(*ex vitro*) was suitable for callus initiation. A combination of TDZ and adenine sulphate (MC, phot. 2) found to be most suitable for faster growth of the callus tissue (135 mg), whereas 2,4-D is most effective in initiation callus culture from explants (89% explants with callus), but such combination (MA and MB) results in a low regeneration potential. However in many plant species application of 2,4-D proved to be highly efficient in the initiation of callus in monocot cultures, but inhibits further regeneration of the callus [Dasgupta et al. 2007, Pant and Joshi 2009]. So it was in the presented studies that examined genotype proved to be resistant to *in vitro* conditions. It is very importance to successful monocot tissue culture to select explants from meristematic regions. Monocotyledonous shoot meristems are basal in origin and stems which lack cambium tissue are especially culture-responsive [Benson 2000]. Asparagus stems contain parenchymateus cells in the vicinity of the vascular bundles and they undergo lignification if the stem allowed to grow [Rodrigez-Arcos et al. 2002]. As we can see phylogeny can have an immediate impact on tissue culture recalcitrance. These unpredictable *in vitro* reactions of *Asparagus setaceus* 'Pyramidalis' may be related to extreme xeromorphic habitats following phylloclade formations.

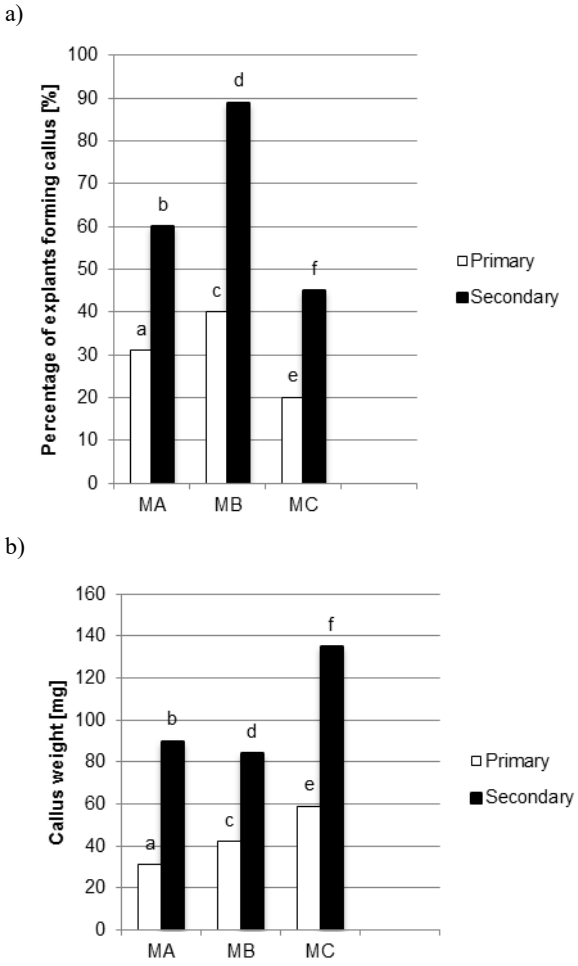


Fig. 3. The effect of origin of explants and medium on callus initiation (a) and mass (b) after 3 months of culture of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis'. Medium MA contained 2,4-D (9.05 μM), MB contained 2,4-D (9.05 μM) + adenine sulphate (10.86 μM), MC contained TDZ (9.08 μM) + adenine sulphate (10.86 μM). Different letters indicate statistically significances at $\alpha = 0.05$

CONCLUSIONS

As described above, the present investigation showed that *in vitro* regeneration of *A. setaceus* 'Pyramidalis' can be obtained using nodal explants only. The final results of propagation by single-node cultures expressed as a ten starting shoots of donor plant: 6 nodes (or more) 14 new shoots 10% rooting

90% survival permitted to receive about 75 (or more) microplants. A high percentage of survival is probably due to the structural adaptations of asparagus to the dry environmental. On the other hand, a limiting factor in obtained a higher multiplications rate is sclerophyll features of asparagus plants.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This Research was financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Poland

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