

Interaction of Plant Growth Regulators on Reversal of Reproductive Character in *Sechium Edule* L. Leading to Increased Yield

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Abstract: A field experiment was conducted to study the effect of interaction of plant growth regulators on reversal of reproductive character in *Sechium edule* L. The growth promoter GA₃ was applied to the seedlings at the concentrations of 100, 250, 500 and 1000 µg/ml. After 7 days of interval the second compound, the growth retardant ethrel at the concentration of 50, 100, 250 and 1000 µg/ml was applied to the squash seedlings by foliar spraying. The optimal concentration of GA₃ (250 µg/ml) in combination with 100 µg/ml of ethrel produced 89.2 number of female flowers against 31.06 number at the control. The same range of GA₃ was applied to the seedlings of squash grown in another plot. After an interval of 7 days, the growth retardant CCC at the concentration of 50, 100, 250 and 1000 µg/ml was applied to the seedlings. GA₃ 250 µg/ml and CCC 250 µg/ml was turned out as optimum concentration produced 140.2 numbers of female flowers against 65.53 at control. The experiment confirmed the effect of interaction of PGRs in *S. edule* L. produced more female flowers than they produced individually which is reflected in increased yield.

Keywords: CCC, Ethrel, GA₃, *Sechium edule* L.

INTRODUCTION

It is now known that sex expression in plants is subject to genetic set up, environmental reaction and chemical makeup of the plant. Besides, the genetical set up the factors which readily affect the sex expression are temperature, day length, nutrition, chemicals and plant growth regulators (Heslop-Harrison 1957, 1963). Manipulation of growth and development of plants for agricultural and horticultural purposes is an absorbing interest to the plant physiologists. The important tools, being used in recent days, for achieving plant types for enhanced productivity of crop plants are some growth promoters and growth retardants (Lama 2000). Growth promoters are types of phytohormones which promote, enhance or accelerate the overall growth, development and metabolism of plants, while growth retardants are usually the synthetic chemicals which suppress the overall growth and metabolism of plants by slowing down cell division and cell elongation without altering their gross morphology (Cathey 1964). Scientists from different parts of the

world are now concentrating on application of PGRs to increase yield and quality of agricultural crops. Application of auxin stimulates development of female flowers rather than male flowers in some cucurbitaceous plant (Laibach and Kribben, 1959). Robinson *et al* (1970) reported that sex expression in cucumber shifted to femaleness by the application of ethephon. While investigating the effect of growth regulators on sex expression of bitter melon, Mia *et al.* (2014) showed that application of CEPA at 150 ppm and NAA at 50 ppm was found to be the best treatments for reducing sex ratio by increasing the female flowers by suppressing the male ones and consequently induce higher yield.

A work was done on influence of plant growth regulators on flowering, fruit yield and quality of pumpkin by Nagaich *et al.* (2000). An experiment was conducted on *Cucurbitamoschata* L cv. local selection and plants were sprayed at the 2 true leaf stage and again at the 3-4 leaf stage with 100 or 200 ppm ethrel, NAA or maleic hydrazide or 25 or 50 ppm gibberellic acid. Fruit yield was highest with

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either concentration of ethrel. Male flowers appeared earliest with 25 ppm gibberellic acid and female flowers with 200 ppm ethrel.

Effect of CCC on fruit set and yield were studied by many workers. Desai *et al* (1982) recorded higher fruit yield in kaghzi lime with the application of CCC at 1000 ppm. Das and Prasad (2004) studied the effect of plant growth regulators on green gram (*Phaseolus radiatus*). They reported that application of CCC 750 ppm significantly increased the number of branches over the control. Thukral *et. al.* (1993) investigated the effect of growth regulators on regulation of crop and fruit quality in lemon and reported that among all the growth regulators CCC increased the number of flowers per tree and decreased the length of shoot. Baruah and Sarma (2013) reported that the application of ethrel and CCC can reverse the reproductive character in *Sechium edule* L. which lead to crop improvement.

Sechium edule L. (squash) is an annual climber belongs to the family cucurbitaceae. The plant bears unisexual flowers but both male and female flowers are borne on the same plant. In general, the plant bears more male flowers than female flowers. The production of fruits depends on number of female flowers the plant bears. Assam, situated in the North Eastern part of India is one of the squash growing area because its agro climatic condition is favourable for cultivation of various plants under cucurbitaceae family. Though this crop is important food item of this region, the average productivity is not enough to fulfil the demand of the people. The reason behind the less production of the crop is the development of more male flowers than female ones by the plant. Development of more female flowers means more production of fruits. The present investigation was carried out to evaluate the combined effects of plant growth promoters (GA_3) and retardants (Ethrel and CCC) on reversal of reproductive characters on *Sechium edule* L. Emphasis was laid on reducing the number of male flowers and at the same time increasing the number of female flowers.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The experiment was conducted to find out the effect of interaction of PGRs on reversal of reproductive character of squash. Botanically squash is known as *Sechium edule* L belonging to the family Cucurbitaceae. The soil of the experimental field was sandy loam with pH value 5.10. The soil was mixed

with organic manure before sowing of seeds. The site received free sunshine.

The healthy squash fruits were collected from the local market of Bongaigaon. The experiment was carried out in two experimental plots with six treatments of PGRs including an untreated control. Each treatment was replicated three times. For interaction of PGRs, the growth promoter GA_3 (Gibberellic acid) at 100 µg/ml, 250 µg/ml, 500 µg/ml and 1000 µg/ml were prepared. When the plants were at seedling stage and about 20 days of emergence of the seedlings the concentrations of GA_3 were applied. The growth retardant Ethrel (2-chloroethyl phosphonic acid) was applied at the concentrations namely 50, 100, 250, 1000 µg/ml after 7 days of interval. One kept as control (distl. water treatment). Similarly in another experimental plot seedlings of squash were grown and GA_3 at 100 µg/ml, 250 µg/ml, 500 µg/ml and 1000 µg/ml were applied and after 7 days the second compound the growth retardant CCC (2-chloroethyl trimethyl ammonium chloride) was also made to seedlings of squash at 50, 100, 250 and 1000 µg/ml by foliar spraying of the solutions. The spray was done twice at 30 days after sowing and again after 7 days of first application. The data was recorded on number of male and female flowers at the flowering stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interaction between ethrel and GA_3 was carried out on squash to examine the combined effect of the compounds on flowering. GA_3 was applied at the concentrations of 100, 250, 500 and 1000 µg/ml, but ethrel was applied at the concentrations of 50, 100, 250 and 1000 µg/ml. Counting the number of flowers was done after 50 days. The number of male flowers produced was recorded as 77.83, 109.73, 106.96 and 79.16 at 100, 250, 500 and 1000 µg/ml concentrations of GA_3 respectively. On the other hand, ethrel produced male flowers were recorded as 77.76, 86.5, 90.83 and 58.63 at 50, 100, 250 and 1000 µg/ml concentrations respectively. Both GA_3 and ethrel at 250 µg/ml emerged as optimal concentration (Figure 1). The optimal concentration of GA_3 (250 µg/ml) in combination with 50, 100, 250 and 1000 µg/ml of ethrel produced 122.73, 138.2, 140.53 and 131.4 number of male flowers respectively against 76.06 number at the control (Table 1).

Statistical analysis (Table 2) of the experimental data reveals that both the compounds imparted their

Table 1
Interaction of Ethrel and GA₃ on production of male flowers in *S. edule* L. (Mean of male flowers for 3 consecutive years)

	Ethrel (mg/ml)		GA ₃ Conc. (mg/ml)		Mean for Ethrel	
	0	100	250	500	1000	
0	76.06	77.83	109.73	106.96	79.16	89.9
50	77.76	85.1	122.96	110.4	102.73	99.8
100	86.5	87.86	138.2	119.76	107.4	107.9
250	90.83	123.73	140.53	136.06	111.4	120.5
1000	58.63	67.5	131.4	107.06	84.63	89.8
Mean	77.9	88.4	128.6	116.0	97.1	

for GA₃
CD for GA₃ (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 2.29, at 1% probability level = 3.00
CD for ethrel (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 2.29, at 1% probability level = 3.00

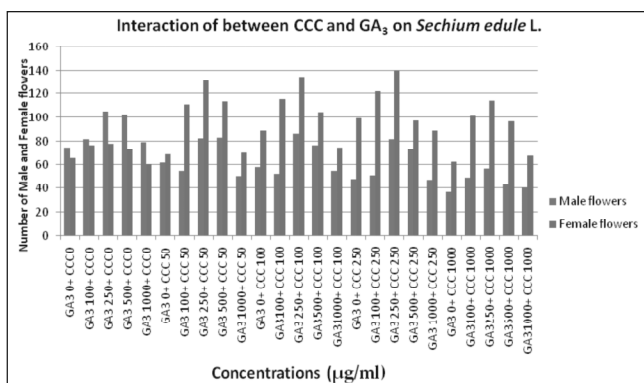


Figure 2: Interaction of between CCC and GA₃ on Sechium edule L.

highly significant effects. The interaction also emerged as highly significant establishing the observed highly stimulatory combined effect of the compounds on production of flowers.

The interaction between ethrel and GA₃ proved to be highly stimulatory in producing female flowers on squash (Table 3). The number of female flowers was recorded as 36.9, 30.4, 29.3, 28.6 at the concentrations of 100, 250, 500 and 1000µg/ml of GA₃. Ethrel produced female flowers were 49.96, 61.4, 31.3, 16.83 at 50, 100, 250 and 1000µg/ml concentrations respectively. GA₃ 250µg/ml and ethrel 100µg/ml turned out to be optimal concentrations. GA₃ 250µg/ml produced female flowers in combination with 50, 100 (Optimum), 250 and 1000µg/ml of ethrel were recorded as 57.2, 89.2, 57.96, 24.4 respectively.

Statistical analysis (Table 4) of pooled data shows the effect of ethrel and GA₃ to be highly significant. The interaction also emerged as highly significant establishing their positive effect in producing more female flowers (Table 5).

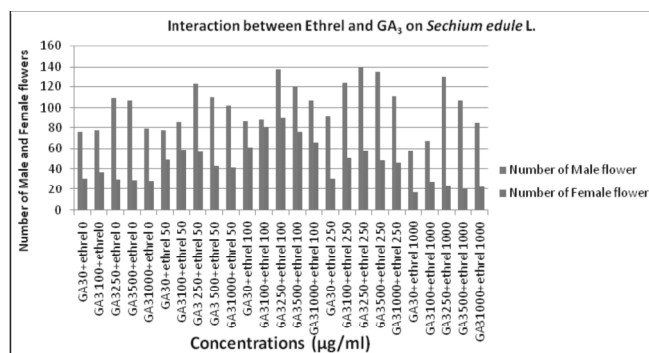


Figure 1: Interaction between Ethrel and GA₃ on Sechium edule L.

Table 2
Analysis of Variance for interaction of ethrel and GA₃ on male flower of *S. edule* L.

Sources of Variance	Df	SS	Mean SS	Variance ratio (F)
GA ₃	4	25344.42	6336.1	621.2**
Ethrel	4	10128.05	2532.0	248.2**
Interaction (Ethrel×GA ₃)	4 × 4 = 16	3323.15	207.7	20.4**
Error	50	510.6	10.2	
Total	75 - 1 = 74	39306.22		

Significant at 1% probability level.

The present investigation also reveals the positive effect of CCC and GA₃ on production of flowers of squash. GA₃ was applied at the concentrations of 100, 250, 500 and 1000µg/ml and CCC at 50, 100, 250 and 1000µg/ml. The number of male flowers was recorded as 81.76, 104.86, 102.86, 102.73 and 79.4 at 100, 250, 500 and 1000µg/ml of GA₃, while CCC at the concentrations of 50, 100, 250 and 1000µg/ml produced 61.63, 57.96, 47.63 and 36.96 numbers of male flowers respectively (Table 6). GA₃ treated plants produced more male flowers than CCC applied plants. Both the compounds in combination produced more flowers than they produced individually. GA₃ 250µg/ml was optimal concentration which produced more number of male flowers which was recorded as 82.3, 86.3, 81.73 and 56.86 in combination with 50, 100, 250 and 1000µg/ml of CCC concentrations. CCC at 50µg/ml was optimal concentration for producing male flowers on squash.

Statistical analysis (Table 7) reveals that both GA₃ and CCC effects as well as their interactions were highly significant.

The response of squash to CCC and GA₃ was more pronounced on production of female flowers than male flowers. GA₃ produced female flowers were recorded as 76.96, 77.86, 73.86 and 60.6 at 100, 250,

Table 3
Interaction of Ethrel and GA₃ on production of female flowers in *S. edule* L. (Mean of female flowers for 3 consecutive years)

	Ethrel (mg/ml)		GA ₃ Conc. (mg/ml)		Mean for Ethrel	
	0	100	250	500	1000	
0	31.06	36.9	30.4	29.3	28.6	31.3
50	49.96	59.0	57.2	43.3	41.63	50.2
100	61.4	80.9	89.27	6.43	66.3	74.8
250	31.3	50.9	57.96	48.96	46.4	47.1
1000	16.83	27.73	24.4	20.4	22.2	22.3
Mean for GA ₃	38.1	51.1	51.8	43.7	41.0	

CD for GA₃ (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 1.51, at 1% probability level = 1.99

CD for ethrel (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 1.51, at 1% probability level = 1.99

Table 4
Analysis of Variance for interaction of ethrel and GA₃ on female flower of *S. edule* L.

Sources of Variance	Df	SS	Mean SS	Variance ratio (F)
GA ₃	4	2230.1	557.5	123.9**
Ethrel	4	24390.4	6097.6	1355**
Interaction (Ethrel × GA ₃)	4 × 4 = 16	1495.5	93.5	20.8**
Error	50	223.5	4.5	
Total	75 - 1 = 74	28339.5		

Significant at 1% probability level.



Plate II: Interaction of GA₃ 250μg/ml and Ethrel 100μg/ml (Optimum) on production of fruits in *S. edule* L.



Plate I: Interaction of GA₃ 250μg/ml and CCC 250μg/ml (Optimum) on production of fruits

Table 5
Interactions between ethrel and GA₃ on *Sechiumedule* L.

Serial No.	Concentration	Male flower	Female flower	Male : female
1.	GA ₃ 0 + ethrel 0	76.06	31.06	2.45:1
2.	GA ₃ 100 + ethrel 0	77.83	36.9	2.11:1
3.	GA ₃ 250 + ethrel 0	109.73	30.4	3.61:1
4.	GA ₃ 500 + ethrel 0	106.96	29.3	3.65:1
5.	GA ₃ 1000 + ethrel 0	79.16	28.6	2.77:1
6.	GA ₃ 0 + ethrel 50	77.76	49.96	1.56:1
7.	GA ₃ 100 + ethrel 50	85.1	59.0	1.44:1
8.	GA ₃ 250 + ethrel 50	122.96	57.2	2.15:1
9.	GA ₃ 500 + ethrel 50	110.4	43.3	2.55:1
10.	GA ₃ 1000 + ethrel 50	102.73	41.63	2.47:1
11.	GA ₃ 0 + ethrel 100	86.5	61.4	1.41:1
12.	GA ₃ 100 + ethrel 100	87.86	80.9	1.09:1
13.	GA ₃ 250 + ethrel 100	138.2	89.2	1.55:1
14.	GA ₃ 500 + ethrel 100	119.76	76.43	1.57:1
15.	GA ₃ 1000 + ethrel 100	107.4	66.3	1.62:1
16.	GA ₃ 0 + ethrel 250	90.83	31.3	2.90:1
17.	GA ₃ 100 + ethrel 250	123.73	50.9	2.43:1
18.	GA ₃ 250 + ethrel 250	140.53	57.96	2.42:1
19.	GA ₃ 500 + ethrel 250	136.06	48.96	2.78:1
20.	GA ₃ 1000 + ethrel 250	111.4	46.4	2.40:1
21.	GA ₃ 0 + ethrel 1000	58.63	16.83	3.48:1
22.	GA ₃ 100 + ethrel 1000	67.5	27.73	2.43:1
23.	GA ₃ 250 + ethrel 1000	131.4	24.4	5.39:1
24.	GA ₃ 500 + ethrel 1000	107.06	20.4	5.25:1
25.	GA ₃ 1000 + ethrel 1000	84.6	22.2	3.81:1

500 and 1000μg/ml respectively. On the other hand CCC produced female flowers were in the order of 69.2, 89.06, 99.1, 62.86 at 50, 100, 250 and 1000μg/ml (Table 8). Both the compound at 250μg/ml turned out to be optimal concentration (Figure2). GA₃ at 250μg/ml produced female flowers in combination with CCC at 50, 100, 250, 1000μg/ml were recorded as 131.16, 134.76, 140.2 and 114.2 respectively. More

Table 6
Interaction of CCC and GA₃ on production of male flowers in *S. edule* L. (Mean of male flowers for 3 consecutive years)

	CCC (mg/ml)		GA ₃ Conc. (mg/ml)		Mean for CCC	
	0	100	250	500	1000	
0	74.86	81.76	104.86	102.73	79.4	88.7
50	61.63	54.96	82.3	83.2	50.1	66.4
100	57.96	52.4	86.3	77.06	54.73	65.7
250	47.63	50.76	81.73	73.86	47.0	60.2
1000	36.96	49.2	56.86	43.53	40.3	45.4
Mean for GA ₃	55.8	57.8	82.4	76.1	54.3	

CD for GA₃ (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 1.57, at 1% probability level = 2.06

CD for CCC (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 1.57, at 1% probability level = 2.06

Table 7
Analysis of Variance for interaction of CCC and GA₃ on male flower of *S. edule* L.

Sources of Variance	Df	SS	Mean SS	Variance ratio (F)
GA ₃	4	10138.1	2534.5	528.02**
CCC	4	14600.1	3650.02	760.4**
Interaction (CCC × GA ₃)	4 × 4 = 16	1763.1	110.2	22.9**
Error	50	241.3	4.8	
Total	75 - 1 = 74	26742.59		

Significant at 1% probability level.

number of female flowers was produced by the combined effect of CCC and GA₃ than they produced individually. Statistical analysis (Table 9) proves that the effects of both the compounds as well as their interaction were highly significant. The Male:female ratio (Table 10) at the respective concentration shows positive impact of the interaction of the PGRs.

The influence of GA₃ on conversion of reproductive character with respect to *S. edule* L studied carefully. The statistical analysis of the experimental data makes it clear that GA₃ imparts a positive response in this crop. The interaction between GA₃ and ethrel and GA₃ and CCC displayed a result with increased number of female flowers (Plate I, II, III, IV, V). The interaction between GA₃ 250 and ethrel 100 µg/ml produced maximum number of female flowers recording it as 89.2. On the other hand GA₃ 250 µg/ml and CCC 250 µg/ml produced maximum female flowers recorded as 140.2. The combined effect of GA₃ and ethrel, GA₃ and CCC can be considered beneficial for squash. This finding is in conformity with the findings of Ao (1996) and Barkataki (2002) who confirmed enhanced flowering



Plate III: *S. edule* L. at flowering stage (Control)

in Kew and Queen varieties of pineapple by the application of GA₃ and ethrel. The results of this present experiment is also in conformity with the findings of Baruahand Sarma (2015) who recommended that the combined effect of ethrel and GA₃, CCC and GA₃ on cucumber is highly significant.

Table 8
Interaction of CCC and GA₃ on production of female flowers in *S. edule* L. (Mean of female flowers for 3 consecutive years)

	Ethrel (mg/ml)		GA ₃ Conc. (mg/ml)		Mean for CCC	
	0	100	250	500	1000	
0	65.53	76.96	77.86	73.86	60.6	70.9
50	69.2	110.86	131.16	113.66	70.1	98.9
100	89.06	115.53	134.76	104.63	74.73	103.7
250	99.1	121.83	140.2	97.63	88.86	109.5
1000	62.86	101.16	114.2	96.93	67.43	88.5
Mean for GA ₃	77.2	105.3	119.6	97.3	72.3	

CD for GA₃ (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 1.45, at 1% probability level = 1.90

CD for CCC (n = 15) at 5% probability level = 1.45, at 1% probability level = 1.90

Table 9
Analysis of Variance for interaction of CCC and GA₃ on female flower of *S. edule* L.

Sources of Variance	Df	SS	Mean SS	Variance ratio (F)
GA ₃	4	23211.9	5802.9	1415.3**
CCC	4	13824.6	3456.2	842.9**
Interaction (CCC × GA ₃)	4 × 4 = 16	4578.8	286.2	69.8**
Error	50	203.6	4.1	
Total	75 - 1 = 74	41818.9		

Significant at 1% probability level.

Sex expression in plants is related to increased nitrogen content of the plant and it can be modified towards femaleness with increased nitrogen uptake (Minina 1938; Ito and Kato 1953; Brantley and Warren 1960). It was reported by Gopalakrishnan (1965) that nitrogen increases in plants with plant growth regulators spray. That the high level of calcium produces more female flowers were reported by Waters and Nettles (1961) and Gopalakrishnan (1965). Singh and Choudhury (1976) confirmed that GA₃ 10 ppm sprayed at two and four leaf stage significantly increased the percentage of calcium which ultimately increased the production of female flowers and thereby yield in cucumber. Davis (1987) suggested that exogenous application of plant growth regulators can alter the sex ratio and sequence, if applied at 2 or 4 leaf stage, the critical stage at which the suppression or promotion of either sex is possible. Hence, modification of sex to desired direction has to be manipulated by exogenous application of plant growth regulators once, twice or even thrice, at different intervals.

Pandey and Singh (1976) proposed that combined application of N and MH produced more female flowers and the greater in yield in bottle gourd. Ghosh and Basu (1983) conducted an experiment to study the effect of plant growth regulators on sex expression in *Momordica charantia* L. by the application of GA₃, IAA and 3-hydroxymethylindole (HMO). They recommended that all that plant growth regulators stimulated female flowering. Both IAA and HMO accelerated ethylene evolution in the seedlings of *M. charantia* L. while a low concentration of ethrel promoted flowering. Growth regulators or phytohormones, especially ethrel (Papadopoulos *et al.* 2005, Manzano *et al.* 2008) and Gibberellic acid *i.e.* GA₃ (Thomas 2008) are mostly used to modify sex expression in melon. A number of investigations have revealed that phytohormones are involved in changes



Plate IV: *S. edule* L. at fruiting stage (Control).

Table 10
Interactions between CCC and GA₃ on *Sechium edule* L.

Serial No.	Concentration	Male flower	Female flower	Male : female
1.	GA ₃ 0 + CCC 0	74.86	65.53	1.41:1
2.	GA ₃ 100 + CCC 0	81.76	76.96	1.06:1
3.	GA ₃ 250 + CCC 0	104.86	77.86	1.35:1
4.	GA ₃ 500 + CCC 0	102.73	73.86	1.39:1
5.	GA ₃ 1000 + CCC 0	79.4	60.6	1.31:1
6.	GA ₃ 0 + CCC 50	61.63	69.2	0.89:1
7.	GA ₃ 100 + CCC 50	54.96	110.86	0.50:1
8.	GA ₃ 250 + CCC 50	82.3	131.16	0.63:1
9.	GA ₃ 500 + CCC 50	83.2	113.66	0.73:1
10.	GA ₃ 1000 + CCC 50	50.1	70.1	0.71:1
11.	GA ₃ 0 + CCC 100	57.96	89.06	0.65:1
12.	GA ₃ 100 + CCC 100	52.4	115.53	0.45:1
13.	GA ₃ 250 + CCC 100	86.3	134.76	0.64:1
14.	GA ₃ 500 + CCC 100	77.06	104.63	0.74:1
15.	GA ₃ 1000 + CCC 100	54.73	74.73	0.73:1
16.	GA ₃ 0 + CCC 250	47.63	99.1	0.48:1
17.	GA ₃ 100 + CCC 250	50.76	121.83	0.42:1
18.	GA ₃ 250 + CCC 250	81.73	140.2	0.58:1
19.	GA ₃ 500 + CCC 250	73.86	97.63	0.76:1
20.	GA ₃ 1000 + CCC 250	47.0	88.86	0.53:1
21.	GA ₃ 0 + CCC 1000	36.96	62.86	0.59:1
22.	GA ₃ 100 + CCC 1000	49.2	101.16	0.49:1
23.	GA ₃ 250 + CCC 1000	56.86	114.2	0.50:1
24.	GA ₃ 500 + CCC 1000	43.53	96.93	0.45:1
25.	GA ₃ 1000 + CCC 1000	40.3	67.43	0.60:1

of flower type, number and ratio of flowers of different sex types, modification of flowering time and of other traits related to sex expression (Noguera *et al.*, 2005; Papadopoulou *et al.* 2005, Yamasaki *et al.* 2005, Ouzounidou *et al.* 2008, Martin *et al.* 2009). Most of these studies were carried out in cucumber, the model plant for studying sex expression in cucurbitaceae. However, most of these investigations were focussed only on one or few traits and by using specific phytohormones. The present investigation confirmed that, the effect of interaction of ethrel and



Plate V: A part of the Experimental plot.

GA₃, CCC and GA₃ is significant in producing maximum female flowers in squash which is reflected in increased yield.

CONCLUSION

In the present study interaction between growth promoter and growth retardant was carried to evaluate their effect on reversal of reproductive character in squash. The combined effect of ethrel and GA₃ proved to be highly effective in generating femaleness on *S.edule* L. GA₃ 250mg/ml and ethrel 100mg/ml turned out as optimal concentration for producing maximum number of female flowers (89.2) against 31.06 at control. However, the number of male flowers was more at the same combination recording 138.2 against 76.06 at the control. But the female flowers were almost three times higher than the control. Similarly, the combined effect of CCC and GA₃ was more pronounced in increasing the femaleness on *S. edule* L. than they produced individually. GA₃ at 250mg/ml in combination with 250mg/ml CCC produced 140.2 number of female

flowers against 65.53 at the control. But the number of male flowers at all combinations was significantly lower than the numbers produced by GA₃ alone. These findings establish the fact that by the combined effect of PGRs the productivity of *S.edule* L. can be increased to such an extent which would fulfil the needs of the farmers and people as well.

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