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## Effect of short-duration high temperatures on weed seed germination

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Effect of short-duration high temperatures on weed seed germination  
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**High temperatures affecting weed seeds**

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**Effect of short-duration high temperatures on weed seed germination**

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## 1   **Summary**

2   Thermal soil disinfestation techniques are effective reducers of weed seedbank and  
3   weed emergence. Two experiments (Exp 1 and 2) were conducted to test the effect of  
4   brief exposure to varying temperatures on the seed germination of *Amaranthus*  
5   *retroflexus*, *Echinochloa crus-galli*, *Galinsoga quadriradiata*, *Portulaca oleracea*,  
6   *Setaria viridis*, and *Solanum nigrum*. To this end, species seeds were moistened with  
7   loamy-sand soil and placed into test tubes. The tubes were heated rapidly and then  
8   cooled by dipping them into a hot water bath until target temperatures were achieved.  
9   Exp 1 temperatures ranged between 55 and 85°C at 5°C intervals and Exp 2 ranged  
10   between 48 and 86°C at 2°C intervals. Thereafter, the tubes were dipped into a cooling  
11   (1°C) water bath. Exposure to target temperatures ranged between 2 and 5 s. Soil  
12   temperatures were monitored using embedded thermocouples. A log-logistic dose-  
13   response model described the effect of heating on seed germinability; temperatures  
14   required for 99% reductions were calculated. Based on the predictive model equation  
15   used, weed species' germination sensitivity to high temperature exposure can be ranked  
16   as follows: *E. crus-galli* (79.6°C), *S. viridis* (75.8°C), *S. nigrum* (74.6°C), *P. oleracea*  
17   (72.2°C), *A. retroflexus* (70.9°C), and *G. quadriradiata* (68.1°C). The interval between  
18   no effect to complete seed devitalisation occurred at temperatures varying from 6.5 to  
19   15.7°C. Seed size and weight varied directly with heat tolerance. Study results not only  
20   inform the timing and optimal adjustment for effective thermal soil treatment, but also  
21   demonstrate a relatively simple and generalizable methodology for use in other studies.

22  
23   Keywords: dose-response model, heat tolerance, seed germination, thermal weed  
24   control, seed devitalisation, soil steaming

25

## 26 **Introduction**

27 Soil thermal treatments can have strong effects on the survival and harmfulness of  
28 several soil-borne organisms, including fungi, nematodes, as well as weed seeds and  
29 vegetative propagules. Soil heating has a long agricultural history and has occasionally  
30 been utilized. Recently, it has again caught the attention of researchers, especially  
31 following the phase-out of methyl bromide, which has long been the most common  
32 fumigant for soil disinfestation, particularly in high-value crops (Van Loenen *et al.*,  
33 2003; Bàrberi *et al.*, 2009).

34 Many techniques have been developed to transfer thermal energy to soil. Generally,  
35 they rely on two concepts—the use of solar energy (Horowitz *et al.*, 1983; Linke, 1994)  
36 and steam (Kolberg & Wiles, 2002; Melander & Jørgensen, 2005; Bàrberi *et al.*, 2009;  
37 Peruzzi *et al.*, 2012). Solar energy and steam reduce weed emergence from the soil  
38 seedbank through exposure to moderate temperatures for long periods (44-55°C for up  
39 to 6 weeks) and to high temperatures for short periods (90-100°C for just minutes),  
40 respectively (Linke, 1994; Bàrberi *et al.*, 2009). Several factors during soil heating are  
41 considered key to germination reduction: maximum temperature attained (Thompson *et al.*  
42 *et al.*, 1997; Melander & Kristensen, 2011), heat duration (Van Loenen *et al.*, 2003), soil  
43 moisture and seed water content (Egley, 1990), seed structure, anatomy and  
44 morphology (e.g., size, seed coat) (Horowitz & Taylorson, 1984), and seed dormancy  
45 dynamics (Thompson *et al.*, 1997). The relative importance of any individual factor is  
46 difficult to assess, but maximum temperature and heat duration are considered foremost  
47 to seed germination reduction.

48 Overall, much of the literature assumes an inverse relationship between temperature and  
49 duration. For example, Dahlquist *et al.* (2007) found that the duration of exposure to  
50 heating to obtain complete mortality varied from 0.17 h at 70 °C to 672 h at 39 °C .

51 Despite these points of general agreement, views differ as to the importance of the  
52 temperature × duration of exposure interaction. Thompson *et al.* (1997) found this  
53 interaction was often erratic, that maximum temperature was generally more important  
54 than duration of exposure, and that temperatures between 50 and 80°C were critical to  
55 reaching seed death. Then, in a study that used laboratory-based soil steaming,  
56 Melander & Jørgensen (2005) found that in *Lolium perenne* L., *Brassica napus* L., and  
57 *Capsella bursa-pastoris* (L.) Medicus seedling emergence after different durations of

58 steaming could be described by a dose-response function, with duration of steaming  
59 representing the dose and seedling emergence the response.

60 In all the studies mentioned above, seeds were exposed to target temperatures only after  
61 undergoing a heating phase above the target temperature. The duration of that heating  
62 phase varied greatly—from as little as 50 s (Melander & Kristensen, 2011) to 30 min  
63 (Dahlquist *et al.*, 2007), but usually this information is not provided. Similarly, the  
64 cooling phase duration between the target temperature and initial temperature is largely  
65 variable and it is often not noted in these studies. When it was reported, it ranged  
66 between 4 min (Melander & Kristensen, 2011) and 20 min (Melander & Jørgensen,  
67 2005).

68 It is known that both seed and soil moisture influence seed susceptibility to heating  
69 (Mas & Verdù, 2002; Verdù & Mas, 2004). Soil moisture at levels near field capacity  
70 yielded, in general, high heating efficiency values via steaming disinfestation methods  
71 (Gay *et al.*, 2010a).

72 Soil as a seed-heating medium seems to be the method of choice to simulate field  
73 conditions in laboratory studies even though non-soil seed-heating mediums are  
74 available and have been used (Mas & Verdù, 2002; Verdù & Mas, 2004). In any case,  
75 formation of some amount of thermal system inertia is unavoidable, and at times, can  
76 result in long heating and cooling phases. These effects have limited the information  
77 available on the importance on weed seed devitalisation of the sole effect of high  
78 temperatures during soil thermal treatment. This information should also be evaluated  
79 considering seed size, which has been reported as one of the traits that may explain  
80 differences in sensitivity to thermal treatments among different species.

81 This study has two objectives: (1) to determine the effect of very short exposure of  
82 weed seeds to a wide range of temperatures, and (2) to determine the relationship  
83 between seed size and species' tolerance to short duration temperature exposure. The  
84 study was mainly designed to provide information that is relevant for soil treatment with  
85 high temperatures for short periods, as in the case of soil steaming. The study was  
86 carried out by exposing seeds to different temperatures while dispersed in soil. Ideally,  
87 this method would also be suitable for testing the interactive effect between duration of  
88 exposure  $\times$  temperature in further studies.

89

90

91

## 92    **Materials and methods**

93    Two experiments (Exp1 and Exp 2) were carried out in 2009 and 2010 in a glasshouse  
94    at the University of Turin (Italy). The seeds of six weed species were treated at different  
95    thermal levels using water baths to determine the effect of maximum temperature on  
96    seed viability. During Exp 1, seven target temperatures were tested, ranging from 55 to  
97    85°C at 5°C intervals. In Exp 2, the seeds were exposed to 20 target temperatures  
98    between 48 and 86°C at intervals of 2°C. Apart from the target temperatures, the two  
99    experiments were executed using the same methodology. Exp 1 was conducted to define  
100    the temperature range required to reduce germination percentage to nil. Exp 2 was  
101    carried out 120 days after Exp 1.

102    Six weed species, representing the most common weeds in Italian horticultural fields,  
103    were included in the study: *Amaranthus retroflexus* L., *Echinochloa crus-galli* (L.) P.  
104    Beauv., *Galinsoga quadriradiata* Cav., *Portulaca oleracea* L., *Setaria viridis* (L.) P.  
105    Beauv., and *Solanum nigrum* L. Save for *G. quadriradiata*, whose seeds were collected  
106    from NW Italy, all seeds were purchased from Herbiseed Corp. (Berkshire, UK). Exp 1  
107    and Exp 2 utilised the same seed lots, except for *S. nigrum*, which necessitated that a  
108    new seed lot be used in Exp 2 due to low germination percentage (<60%) of untreated  
109    seeds in Exp 1. Before the initiation of the experiments, all seeds were stored in the dark  
110    at 4°C.

111

### 112    Seed preparation

113    Except for *P. oleracea*, for all species and target temperature 10 ml Pyrex<sup>®</sup> glass test  
114    tubes (16×100 mm) were filled with 3 g of loamy sand soil that had been pre-moistened  
115    to 11.2% water content (corresponds to 80% field capacity) and mixed with 30 seeds.  
116    The soil used in the study contained 85% sand, 8% silt and 7% clay and it was  
117    collected at 0-30 cm depth from a horticultural farm in NW Italy (45.000766° N;  
118    7.720452° E). The amount of seeds included in each tube was defined in order to assure  
119    the recovery of at least 20 seeds after the thermal treatment.

120    Each tube was then fitted with a screw cap to avoid humidity loss. All tubes processed  
121    in this manner were prepared 24 h prior to heat treatment to allow seed equilibration  
122    with the soil. During this phase, the tubes were stored in the dark at 4°C to prevent seed  
123    germination.

124    As the soil used for treatment testing was naturally rich in *P. oleracea* seeds (pers.  
125    observ.), *P. oleracea* seeds were enclosed *sans* soil in bags (2×2 cm) made of

126 nonwoven fabric, and then inserted into tubes and soil was added to evenly coat the  
127 bags. Also in this case, four (Exp 1) or three (Exp 2) glass test tubes were prepared for  
128 each target temperature. Given the high speed of *P. oleracea* seed germination, these  
129 tubes were prepared a mere two hours before treatment.

130 Images were taken of 30 seeds of each species, from the same seed lots as those used in  
131 the trial, using a flatbed scanner (Mustek P 3600 A3 Pro) at a resolution of 600 dpi. The  
132 images were processed using image analysis software ImageJ (Schneider *et al.*, 2012)  
133 and measurements were taken and recorded of the length and width of each seed.  
134 Finally, three samples of 300 seeds for each species were counted and weighted in order  
135 to assess the 1000-seed weight.

136

#### 137 Temperature recording

138 Soil temperatures were monitored using T-type (copper-constantan) thermocouples  
139 (probe tubes) connected to a data logger (National Instruments® FP-TC-120) fitted into  
140 the test tubes. The thermocouples were inserted into probe tubes through a small hole  
141 drilled in the test tube screw-cap, and their tip was placed in the centre of the soil  
142 volume by adjusting the connecting wire length. Temperatures were measured and  
143 recorded continuously every 2 s from initiation of treatment to end. Temperature  
144 readings were also continuously displayed on a portable PC to obtain real-time  
145 information of probe tube thermal status. A series of T-type thermocouples were also  
146 used to monitor all water bath temperatures. An additional thermocouple connected to  
147 the same logging system was immersed simultaneously with the tubes to record the  
148 exact time of immersion in all water baths. Before treatment application, all  
149 thermocouples were calibrated using a PT100 temperature probe with 0.1°C resolution.

150

#### 151 Thermal treatment

152 Heat treatments were applied using three water baths (REF, HOT, COLD) in which the  
153 tubes were sequentially dipped. The tubes were arranged in polypropylene test-tube  
154 racks equipped with a handle and moved simultaneously between baths. Temperature  
155 was monitored by an average of the values of two probe tubes in each rack. First, the  
156 tubes were dipped into the 23 °C REF bath (reference standard for the study) after  
157 moisture equilibration at 4 °C and 30 min before thermal treatment. This bath was  
158 comprised of a 70-litre plastic tank heated by an immersion circulator (Julabo ED  
159 1000 W). Once thermal equilibration was attained in REF, the tubes were dipped into a



160 second water bath (HOT). This bath consisted of a five-litre stainless steel tank set 3 °C  
161 above the target temperature to quickly heat the soil and was kept constant during  
162 treatment with a laboratory immersion circulator (Julabo ED 2000 W) inserted into the  
163 tank. The tank water level was fixed exactly to submerge the tubes up to 2 cm below  
164 their caps; extra water was added as needed to compensate for evaporation. Transfer of  
165 the tubes to the third water bath (COLD) occurred immediately upon when the target  
166 temperature of the soil was reached. This bath was set to approximately 1 °C for quick  
167 cooling and to allow the soil to return to temperature of about 23 °C. The tubes were  
168 then transferred back to the REF bath.

169 For each species and target temperature, four (Exp 1) or three replications (Exp 2) were  
170 considered and a single test tube represented the experimental unit and one replication.  
171 Four (Exp 1) or three (Exp 2) untreated tubes for each species were maintained in the  
172 REF bath for the entire duration of the treatment as controls. The treatment structure  
173 was a two-way factorial, with factors represented by species (6 levels in both Exp 1 and  
174 Exp 2) and target temperature (8 levels in Exp 1, 21 levels in Exp 2). The treatments  
175 were arranged according to a completely randomized design.

176 Within a few minutes of reaching the reference temperature following the second  
177 passage in the REF bath, the mixture of seeds and soil was pulled from the tubes and the  
178 seeds manually separated from the soil. From each tube, 20 randomly selected seeds  
179 were placed in a Petri dish (9 cm diameter) lined with two No. 1 Whatman filter papers  
180 (Whatman International Ltd.) to which 6 ml of deionized water was added. The Petri  
181 dishes were incubated in a growth chamber at a constant temperature of 25 °C and  
182 16h/8h of light/dark cycles for 20 days. Preliminary tests showed that germination was  
183 observed after 10 days for all weed species (data not shown). Germinated seeds were  
184 counted daily and water was added as needed to preserve the initial moisture level.

185 The greatest portion (always exceeding 90%) of non-germinated seeds had cracked seed  
186 coats after germination test and were assumed dead. For each species, tetrazolium test  
187 was performed on a small portion of intact seeds treated in Exp 1 and none were viable  
188 (data not shown). The test was not conducted in *P. oleracea* and *A. retroflexus*, as it was  
189 not possible to pierce the seed coat without destroying the embryo. In a similar study  
190 conducted by Dahlquist *et al.* (2007) percentage of viability in heat-treated seeds was <  
191 1% in *E. crus-galli* and *S. nigrum*. Non-germinated, viable seeds were not accounted for  
192 in this study and non-germinated seeds were all assumed dead.

193 The germinability, expressed as percentage of germination, refers to the percentage of  
194 seeds that produced regular seedlings (ISTA, 2009). Germination data obtained from the  
195 untreated tubes maintained in the REF bath during the treatment application represented  
196 the initial status of germination of each seed lots at the time the experiment was carried  
197 out.

198

#### 199 Data analysis

200 Data were first subjected to ANOVA to test the effect of species, target temperature and  
201 its interaction on germination. The analysis was conducted separately for Exp 1 and Exp  
202 2 and was performed using the function *lm* of the open source programme and  
203 environment R.

204 The germination data for each test species were then fitted to a 3-parameter log-logistic  
205 regression model (Streibig *et al.*, 1993; Ascard, 1994; Ascard, 1995; Seefeldt *et al.*,  
206 1995; Knezevic *et al.*, 2007):

207

$$208 \quad Y = \frac{d}{1 + \exp[b(\log x - \log e)]} \quad (1)$$

209

210 where  $Y$  is the percentage of germination,  $d$  is the upper limit, and  $b$  is the relative slope  
211 at the point of inflection  $e$ . Having recorded the actual temperature of the tubes during  
212 the entire thermal treatment, the recorded maximum temperature was set as the  
213 independent variable  $x$ . In any case, the recorded maximum temperature always differed  
214 from the target temperature by less than 0.5 °C.

215 As germination of *G. quadriradiata* at low target temperatures was enhanced in  
216 comparison to the control, data of this species were fitted to the following Brain-  
217 Cousens hormesis model (Brain & Cousens, 1989; Schabenberger *et al.*, 1999):

218

$$219 \quad Y = \frac{d + fx}{1 + \exp[b(\log x - \log e)]} \quad (2)$$

220

221 where the linear term  $f$  considers the stimulatory effects at sub-lethal temperatures.

222 Both models do not include an estimate for a parameter representing a lower asymptote  
223 of  $Y$ , as in this study the percentage of germination fell to zero at high temperatures in  
224 all species. In contrast, no constraints were included in the estimate of the higher

225 asymptote  $d$  (except it had not to be higher than 100 which is equivalent to 100%  
 226 germination).

227 Model fitting was performed using the function *drm* of the add-on package *drc* of the R  
 228 software (Ritz & Streibig, 2005; Ritz *et al.*, 2006); this package has been developed  
 229 mainly to perform non-linear regression analysis on bioassay studies. As the initial  
 230 status of germination was lower than 100% and variable among species, model fitting  
 231 was performed including the percentage of germination as response variable and the  
 232 total number of seeds included in the germination test (always 20) as value for the  
 233 argument *weights* of the function *drm* and specifying the case “binomial” for the  
 234 argument *type* (Ritz & Streibig, 2012). With this set of instructions, the initial status of  
 235 germination was considered in the model fitting and the *drm* function gave correct  
 236 estimations of  $ET_z$  values (see below).

237 Data from Exp 1 and Exp 2 were first analysed separately and then pooled to fit into a  
 238 single model. The *anova* function of R was used to compute a likelihood ratio test to  
 239 verify if the pooled dataset was significantly better explained by two curves fitting Exp  
 240 1 and Exp 2 data separately than by a single model fitting all data.

241 With the parameters estimated, the equations allowed to calculate the temperature  $ET_z$   
 242 (Melander & Jørgensen, 2005) required to obtain a certain level of germination  
 243 reduction in comparison to untreated seeds.  $ET_z$  values and their upper and lower  
 244 confidence limits ( $\alpha=0.95$ ) were estimated using the function *ED* of the package *drc*. In  
 245 this study,  $ET_z$  was estimated for  $z = 10\%$ ,  $90\%$ , and  $99\%$ , which correspond to  
 246 temperatures that cause 10, 90 and 99% reduction in germination, respectively. For each  
 247 species and experiment, target temperatures were considered “ineffective” if lower than  
 248  $ET_{10}$ . A reduction on the percentage of germinated seeds after thermal treatment of 90%  
 249 ( $ET_{90}$ ) was considered as a standard reference threshold in previous studies (Hansson &  
 250 Ascard, 2002; Hansson & Mattsson, 2002).  $ET_{99}$  can be regarded as a threshold for  
 251 complete seed devitalisation.

252 For each species, the function *SI* of the package *drc* was used to test for differences  
 253 between  $ET_z$  calculated from Exp 1 and Exp 2.

254 To evaluate the relationship between seed size and heating tolerance, the values of  $ET_{99}$   
 255 were plotted as a function of the variables seed length×width and 1000-seed weight.  
 256 When significant differences in  $ET_{99}$  calculated from Exp 1 and Exp 2 were found for  
 257 some species, only the estimates obtained from Exp 2 were used.

258

259

## 260 **Results**

### 261 Temperature dynamics

262 Thermal treatment can be divided into four phases: a) thermal equilibration at the  
263 standard reference temperature (23 °C); b) heating to reach the target temperature; c)  
264 cooling, and d) re-stabilization to the standard reference temperature (Fig. 1). Phase b)  
265 (heating) began when the temperature recorded by the probe tubes increased by more  
266 than 1 °C relative to the standard reference temperature. The time between immersion in  
267 the HOT bath and the beginning of phase b) was relatively short in all conditions, as it  
268 ranged from 1 to 5 s. Duration in both phase b) and c) varied as a function of target  
269 temperature. When exposed to the lower temperatures, only a short time was needed to  
270 heat and cool the seeds as opposed to the longer time required at higher target  
271 temperatures. Among the species, the average heating phase lasted for 63 s (target  
272 temperature 50 °C) to 83 s (target temperature 86 °C) while the cooling phase duration  
273 ranged between 33 s (target temperature 50 °C) and 54 s (target temperature 86 °C). The  
274 tubes were removed from the COLD bath and transferred to the REF bath exactly when  
275 their temperature dropped to 23 °C. Although temperatures continued to fall after  
276 immersion in the REF bath for another 30 s and to a low of about 15 °C as recorded by  
277 the probe tubes, they eventually rose to the standard reference temperature. This  
278 stabilization process (phase d) was a condition of the thermal inertia of the system  
279 formed by the tubes and soil.

280 The methodology used allowed exposure to the target temperature for between 2 s and  
281 5 s, with an average of 2.7 s. Moreover, the difference between the actual and target  
282 temperature values was always lower than 0.5 °C.

283

### 284 Effects of thermal treatment on percentage of germination

285 With the exception of the *S. nigrum* seeds used in Exp 1, the initial percentage of  
286 germination of untreated seeds was always at least 60% (Table 1). Results of ANOVA  
287 indicated that both species and target temperature had significant effect on the  
288 proportion of germinated seeds (data not shown). Also the interaction species × target  
289 temperature was significant, indicating that the effect of temperature varied according to  
290 the species. This can be explained by the behaviour of *G. quadriradiata*, which  
291 germination was enhanced at lower temperatures (see below). For all species, the  
292 variation of proportion of germinated seeds as a function of maximum achieved

293 temperature was well described by the selected regression models in both Exp 1 and  
 294 Exp 2 (Table 2). The temperature interval gave good coverage of the different responses  
 295 from no effect to complete seed devitalisation (Fig. 2). The target temperatures gave  
 296 intermediate responses around the point of inflection of the estimated response curves.  
 297 This was more evident in Exp 2, where the responses were more evenly distributed  
 298 between the upper asymptote and zero, which allowed for a more reliable fit.  
 299 In general,  $ET_{10}$  was very close to 60 °C for the majority of the species. *E. crus-galli*  
 300 was the only species which deviated strongly from this behaviour, showing an  $ET_{10}$  of  
 301 68.6 and 73.5 °C in Exp 1 and Exp 2, respectively (Table 3). The transition between  
 302  $ET_{10}$  and  $ET_{99}$  occurred in a temperature range from 6.5 °C (*G. quadriradiata*) to  
 303 15.7 °C (*S. viridis*).  
 304 *G. quadriradiata* seeds were the most affected by thermal treatment (Table 3). Even  
 305 though germination was enhanced by exposure to temperatures between 50 and 56 °C,  
 306 germination quickly decreased compared to the untreated at temperatures greater than  
 307 58 °C. Two separate curves for Exp 1 and Exp 2 provided a significantly better  
 308 explanation than a single curve fitting all the data from the two experiments (Table 2).  
 309 This was mainly due to a slightly stronger stimulatory effect at sub-lethal temperatures  
 310 and a higher sensitivity to high temperatures observed in Exp 2. Consequently, only  
 311  $ET_{10}$  was similar in the two experiments while  $ET_{90}$  and  $ET_{99}$  were always significantly  
 312 higher in Exp 1 (Table 3). Germination dropped to negligible levels after exposure at  
 313 temperatures above 70.4 °C (Exp 1) and 65.8 °C (Exp 2).  
 314 In *A. retroflexus* regression analysis revealed that results from Exp 1 and Exp 2 were  
 315 significantly different (Table 2). This might be due to a higher initial percentage of  
 316 germination of untreated seeds in Exp 1 that resulted in a higher upper asymptote and in  
 317 a higher temperature at the point of inflection between the upper asymptote and zero.  
 318 This may explain the fact that both  $ET_{10}$  and  $ET_{90}$  were significantly greater in Exp 1  
 319 while  $ET_{99}$  was the same between the two experiments, and averaged 70.9 °C (Table 3).  
 320 A similar behavior was observed in *P. oleracea*, but in this case the highest percent  
 321 germination were observed in Exp 2. Significant differences between the two  
 322 experiments were recorded for  $ET_{90}$  only;  $ET_{99}$  averaged 72.2 °C.  
 323 In the case of *S. nigrum*, Exp 1 and Exp 2 were performed using different seed lots  
 324 given that the germinability of untreated seeds in Exp 1 was less than 60%. The two  
 325 curves describing Exp 1 and Exp 2 data differed significantly (Table 2). Nevertheless,

326 differences between  $ET_z$  calculated from the two experiments were significant for  $ET_{10}$   
327 only. In particular,  $ET_{99}$  averaged 74.5 °C (Table 3).

328 In *S. viridis*, the slightly higher germination of Exp 1 untreated seeds resulted in an  
329 overall significant difference in the two curves fitting Exp 1 and Exp 2 data (Table 2)  
330 even though the computed  $ET_{10}$ ,  $ET_{90}$ , and  $ET_{99}$  values never differed significantly  
331 between the two experiments and averaged 60.5, 69.95, and 75.7 °C, respectively  
332 (Table 3).

333 In *E. crus-galli*, germinability recorded in Exp 2 followed an unexpected course as it  
334 initially declined steadily from 75% to 58% in temperatures ranging from about 48 to  
335 58 °C. Afterwards, germinability rose to 87% at 66 °C, then finally dropped to values  
336 near zero for temperatures above 80 °C (Figure 2). This behavior, coupled with an  
337 overall higher tolerance to heating observed in Exp 2, caused the data obtained in the  
338 two experiments to not be describable by a single curve (Table 2). Accordingly,  $ET_z$   
339 values always differed significantly between the two experiments. In any case, the  
340 calculated  $ET_{10}$  values indicated that *E. crus-galli* germinability started to be affected at  
341 temperatures between 68.6 and 73.5 °C while  $ET_{99}$  values indicated that germinability  
342 started to be negligible at temperatures ranging from 77.8 to 81.4 °C (Table 3).

343

#### 344 Relationship between seed size and tolerance to thermal treatment

345 The smallest seeds were those of *P.oleracea*, which showed a length×width of 2.49  
346 mm<sup>2</sup> and a 1000-seed weight of 0.118 g. At the opposite, *E. crus-galli* showed the  
347 biggest seeds, with a length×width of 26.60 mm<sup>2</sup> and a 1000-seed weight of 1.97 g.  
348 Seed size and  $ET_{99}$  values varied in direct proportion. While the six species considered  
349 in this study is insufficient to allow full and evenly distributed coverage of all possible  
350 seed sizes, the results indicated that seed size, expressed as length×width or 1000-seed  
351 weight, and tolerance to thermal treatment may be described by logarithmic or linear  
352 model, respectively (Fig. 3). In particular, the increase of 1000-seed weight by 1 g  
353 resulted in an average increase of  $ET_{99}$  by about 6.6 °C.

354

#### 355 **Discussion**

356 The methodology adopted in this study tested the effect of short exposure to different  
357 temperatures on germination of weed seeds dispersed in a small amount of soil. With  
358 the adopted methodology, some amount of thermal inertia was unavoidably introduced  
359 into the study. As a consequence, additional time was required to allow the seeds to

360 reach the target temperature and to cool them to the standard reference temperature  
 361 (23 °C). Both these heating and cooling phases were significantly shorter than those  
 362 reported in previous studies. Further reduction of the heating and cooling phases could  
 363 be accomplished by treating the seeds without their dispersal into soil. Although, data  
 364 acquired under such conditions is limited practically, as real soil thermal treatments are  
 365 always affected by discrete heating and cooling phases (Gay *et al.*, 2010a,b).  
 366 Complete seed devitalisation (i.e., the temperature causing at least 99% germination  
 367 reduction) was achieved in the different species at temperatures spanning 64 °C to  
 368 80 °C. In particular, *E. crus-galli* showed itself to be the least heat-susceptible, which  
 369 agrees with results from Melander & Jørgensen (2005) and Bårberi *et al.* (2009). In  
 370 contrast, Dahlquist *et al.* (2007) reported that *E. crus-galli* was more susceptible to heat  
 371 than *S. nigrum* and *P. oleracea*. It should be noted, however, in Dahlquist *et al.* (2007)  
 372 the seeds that underwent thermal treatment were previously moistened by dipping them  
 373 in water and then placing between moist paper towels for 24 h. This might have caused  
 374 the seeds to have higher moisture content which in turn lead to a higher susceptibility to  
 375 thermal treatment (Egley, 1990) .  
 376 The higher heat tolerance of *E. crus-galli* found in our study can be partly attributed to  
 377 seed structure; the caryopsis is protected by its glumellae (adheres to caryopsis), sterile  
 378 floret, the second glumae, and partially by the first glumae (Maun & Barret, 1986). This  
 379 structure persists in seeds harvested and stored as was true of those used in this study.  
 380 However, in field conditions, both the glumae and sterile floret are gradually lost while  
 381 the seeds stay in the soil. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that the actual average  
 382 tolerance to soil heating by *E. crus-galli* seeds under field conditions is lower than that  
 383 observed in our study. It is also possible that the seed structure may have played a role  
 384 in the erratic behaviour of seed germinability observed after seed exposure to  
 385 temperatures in the 48 to 66 °C range.  
 386 Seed size may also play a role in the response to thermal treatments. Among the species  
 387 in this study, *E. crus-galli* had the biggest seeds and showed the highest tolerance to  
 388 heating. In general, the model predicted a higher  $ET_{99}$  for *P. oleracea* based on its seed  
 389 size and seed weight. Possible reasons for this lower sensitivity may relate to the  
 390 appended seed soil permanence before treatment (2 h *versus* 24 h), which may have  
 391 resulted in a reduced seed moisture content though the nonwoven bag enclosures  
 392 relative to the other species. Nonetheless, this valuable result highlights the fact that  
 393 conditions other than the tested temperatures may influence study outcomes. For this

394 reason, study results should be considered carefully, and attention should be paid to  
395 methodology.

396 The response of seed germinability to thermal treatment was described using logistic  
397 regression models. Similar dose-response relationships were found by others  
398 investigating thermal weed control from several directions: laboratory steaming  
399 experiments (Melander & Jørgensen, 2005), hot water effects on weed seedling studies  
400 (Hansson & Ascard, 2002; Hansson & Mattsson, 2002), and flame-weeding  
401 investigations (Ulloa *et al.*, 2010; Ulloa *et al.*, 2012).

402 For all species, results from Exp 1 and Exp 2 were significantly different, likely  
403 consequent to the lower initial status of germination of the seeds used in Exp 2. This  
404 may be due to the 120-days interval between Exp 2 and Exp 1 during which a certain  
405 amount of germinability might have been lost. In the case of *S. nigrum*, the observed  
406 behaviour was exactly contrary; however, its variation is attributed to the different seed  
407 lots used in Exp 1 and Exp 2.

408 Significant differences in  $ET_z$  values reflect Exp 1 and Exp 2 dissimilarities in only  
409 some cases. In particular,  $ET_{99}$  values between the two experiments were significantly  
410 different for *E. crus-galli* and *G. quadriradiata* only. However, even for these species,  
411 the  $ET_{99}$  values estimated from the two experiments differed by less than 5 °C (3.6 °C  
412 and 4.6 °C in *E. crus-galli* and *G. quadriradiata*, respectively). Differences between the  
413 two experiments could also be attributed to the higher number of data points in Exp 2  
414 and to the different temperature increments tested.

415 *G. quadriradiata* germination data were described using a model that included a  
416 parameter that took in account the stimulatory effect at sub-lethal temperatures. This  
417 phenomenon is well known for dose-response bioassays, including studies dealing with  
418 herbicides (Brain & Cousens, 1989; Cedergreen *et al.*, 2005). Some plant species in  
419 natural fire-prone environments exhibit similar behaviour (Read *et al.*, 2000; Delgado *et*  
420 *al.*, 2001), however little information exists on annual weeds in agricultural settings  
421 (Vidotto *et al.*, 2009).

422 Germination stimulation post heat exposure can result from several cooperating  
423 phenomena including increased water and gas permeability of the seed and seed coat  
424 inhibitor denaturation (Van Staden *et al.*, 2000; Paula & Pausas, 2008). Considering that  
425 different portions of the soil volume can reach sub-lethal temperatures, the overall  
426 efficacy of soil thermal treatment could theoretically be lower in species for which  
427 germination is stimulated by treatment itself. The size and distribution of soil regions



428 that reach sub-lethal temperatures can vary according to the adopted soil heating  
429 methodology and can be largely influenced by soil texture and the presence of soil  
430 aggregates, especially in steaming (Melander & Jørgensen, 2005; Vidotto *et al.*, 2009).  
431 The results of this study can be relevant for soil thermal treatments in general, and may  
432 be useful for steaming in particular, as this technique allows the attainment of high soil  
433 temperatures for short intervals.

434 For the weeds included in this study, it appears exposure to temperatures of 80 °C for  
435 few seconds is sufficient to obtain satisfactory control. This information is relevant for  
436 fine-tuning the use of steam in thermal soil treatments and may further reduce the  
437 energy requirement of this technique. This can be in particular useful for steam  
438 application techniques based on localised injections for short durations, as in the case of  
439 band steaming (Ascard *et al.*, 2007) or sub-superficial soil steaming (Gay *et al.*, 2010a;  
440 Gay *et al.*, 2010b). Caution must be adopted when considering real field treatment and  
441 conditions. Both heating and cooling phases are believed to last longer than observed in  
442 this study, which suggests that the actual efficacy could be higher than through simple  
443 extrapolation. It may even have the potential to compensate for the presence of soil  
444 regions reaching sub-lethal temperatures due to the effect of soil aggregates. Moreover,  
445 laboratory experiments oftentimes do not accurately reflect the potential effect of soil  
446 organisms and chemicals on seed decay (Stapleton & DeVay, 1986; Stapleton *et al.*,  
447 2000; Dahlquist *et al.*, 2007); such phenomena would suggest this study may  
448 overestimate the maximum temperature needed to devitalize the weed seeds.

449 The results of this study are relevant also for solar soil heating, since in this technique  
450 the stimulatory effect of sub-lethal temperatures may play an important role. During  
451 solar soil heating, in fact, the temperatures attained may be often in a range  
452 corresponding to that at which stimulations has been observed in our study. For species  
453 behaving similarly to *G. quadriradiata* this may result in increased emergence after  
454 treatment. Although, the stimulation may be severely reduced or nullified by the long  
455 duration of the exposure, as solar soil heating may require up to several weeks to be  
456 effective, depending on the local weather, climate and soil moisture conditions  
457 (Stapleton, 2000).

458

459 The methodology described and used here is relatively simple and demands little more  
460 than basic laboratory equipment. Thus, it can be easily extended to the study of thermal  
461 effects on other species seed viability and/or for media other than soil. Furthermore, this

462 study not only gives insight into the sole effect of temperature, but also it does not  
463 exclude the fact that exposure duration impacts loss of seed germinability. Further  
464 studies should build upon this information and analyse the effect of time exclusive of  
465 temperatures above  $ET_{99}$  and focus on the range of temperatures that resulted in only a  
466 partial reduction of seed germinability.  
467 With this method, it will also be possible to study also the effects of others factors that  
468 may affect seed germinability. For instance, the role of soil texture and moisture may  
469 deserve to be investigated. The use of soil as medium for dispersing the seeds to be  
470 exposed to different thermal conditions may also allow the study on the combined  
471 effects of other techniques that may promote the effects of soil heating, such use the use  
472 of KOH-activated soil steaming (Bàrberi *et al.*, 2009).

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## Tables

Table 1. Initial status of germination (percent) of seeds used in Exp 1 and Exp 2. Values are average of four (Exp 1) or three (Exp 2) replicates of 20 seeds each.

Species	Germination %	
	Exp 1	Exp 2
<i>Amaranthus retroflexus</i>	86.2 (2.39)	80.0 (5.00)
<i>Echinochloa crus-galli</i>	78.1 (1.31)	76.7 (4.41)
<i>Galinsoga quadriradiata</i>	60.0 (7.36)	65.0 (2.89)
<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>	66.2 (8.75)	71.7 (7.26)
<i>Setaria viridis</i>	98.7 (1.25)	95.0 (2.89)
<i>Solanum nigrum</i> <sup>b</sup>	53.7 (5.54)	95.0 (2.89)

<sup>a</sup>SE in parentheses; <sup>b</sup> different seed lots used in Exp 1 and Exp 2.

496 Table 2. Parameter estimates for *A. retroflexus*, *E. crus-galli*, *P. oleracea*, *S. viridis*, and  
 497 *S. nigrum* based on equation (1) and *G. quadriradiata* based on equation (2),  $R^2$  of the  
 498 regressions, and probability ( $P$ ) of the likelihood ratio test that assumes that data from  
 499 Exp 1 and Exp 2 can be described by a single model instead of two separated models.

Species	Exp	Estimated model parameters				$R^2$	$P$
		$b$	$d$	$e$	$f$		
<i>A. retroflexus</i>	1	49.148	87.195	65.696	-	0.955	<0.0000
	2	38.278	79.119	61.812	-	0.927	
<i>E. crus-galli</i>	1	53.734	79.409	71.464	-	0.977	<0.0000
	2	66.484	72.160	75.959	-	0.842	
<i>G. quadriradiata</i>	1	40.500	52.467	62.253	0.337	0.954	0.0075
	2	67.417	62.221	61.335	0.189	0.934	
<i>P. oleracea</i>	1	39.807	63.726	64.931	-	0.927	0.0038
	2	33.463	65.698	62.292	-	0.915	
<i>S. viridis</i>	1	31.089	99.145	65.101	-	0.993	0.0043
	2	29.290	93.360	64.980	-	0.970	
<i>S. nigrum</i>	1	40.910	61.626	67.065	-	0.874	<0.0000
	2	34.350	87.539	64.931	-	0.950	

500



501

502 Table 3. Temperatures required to obtain 10%, 90%, and 99% ( $ET_{10}$ ,  $ET_{90}$ , and  $ET_{99}$ ,  
503 respectively) germination reduction compared with the untreated seeds and their lower  
504 and upper confidence limits estimated from equation (1) for *A. retroflexus*, *E. crus-galli*,  
505 *P. oleracea*, *S. viridis*, and *S. nigrum* and equation (2) for *G. quadriradiata*<sup>a</sup>. Species are  
506 listed for growing values of  $ET_{99}$ . *P* values are the probability that  $ET_z$  calculated from  
507 Exp 1 and Exp 2 are estimates of the same value.

508

Species	Exp	$ET_{10}$				$ET_{90}$				$ET_{99}$			
		Estimate	conf. limits		$P$	Estimate	conf. limits		$P$	Estimate	conf. limits		$P$
			lower	upper			lower	upper			lower	upper	
$G. quadriradiata$	1	61.3 (0.93)	59.5	63.2	0.372	66.4 (0.78)	64.8	67.9	0.002	70.4 (1.43)	67.6	73.2	0.007
	2	60.3 (0.70)	58.9	61.7		63.5 (0.41)	62.7	64.4		65.8 (0.83)	64.2	67.5	
$A. retroflexus$	1	62.8 (0.64)	61.6	64.1	<0.001	68.7 (0.54)	67.6	69.7	<0.001	72.1 (1.10)	70.0	74.3	0.152
	2	58.4 (1.04)	56.3	60.4		65.5 (0.49)	64.5	66.4		69.7 (1.25)	67.2	72.1	
$P. oleracea$	1	61.4 (1.24)	59.0	63.9	0.057	68.6 (0.76)	67.1	70.1	0.027	72.9 (1.71)	69.5	76.2	0.513
	2	58.3 (1.01)	56.4	60.3		66.5 (0.56)	65.4	67.6		71.5 (1.29)	68.9	74.0	
$S. nigrum$	1	63.6 (0.76)	62.1	65.1	0.015	70.8 (0.73)	69.3	72.2	0.077	75.0 (1.38)	72.3	77.8	0.644
	2	60.9 (0.75)	59.4	62.4		69.2 (0.48)	68.3	70.2		74.2 (1.07)	72.1	76.3	
$S. viridis$	1	60.7 (0.59)	59.6	61.8	0.654	69.9 (0.59)	68.7	71.0	0.820	75.5 (1.12)	73.2	77.7	0.720
	2	60.3 (0.59)	59.1	61.4		70.0 (0.48)	69.1	71.0		76.0 (1.01)	74.0	78.0	
$E. crus-galli$	1	68.6 (0.63)	67.4	69.8	<0.001	74.4 (0.58)	73.3	75.6	<0.001	77.8 (1.05)	75.8	79.9	0.008
	2	73.5 (0.59)	72.3	74.6		78.5 (0.42)	77.7	79.3		81.4 (0.86)	79.7	83.1	

<sup>a</sup>SE in parentheses; df are 33 and 60 for Exp 1 and Exp 2, respectively (except for *G. quadriradiata*: 32 and 59 in Exp 1 and Exp 2, respectively).

509

### Figure legends

510 Fig. 1. Temperature dynamics recorded during thermal treatment with target  
511 temperatures of 50, 60, 70 and 80 °C in Exp 2. (a) Thermal equilibration at standard  
512 reference temperature (23 °C); (b) Heating phase to reach the target temperature; (c)  
513 Cooling phase; (d) Stabilization to standard reference temperature.

514

515

516 Fig. 2. Relationship between target temperature and germination percentage in Exp 1  
517 and Exp 2. Curves of *Amaranthus retroflexus*, *Echinochloa crus-galli*, *Portulaca*  
518 *oleracea*, *Setaria viridis* and *Solanum nigrum* are fitted by equation (1); curves of  
519 *Galinsoga quadriradiata* are fitted by equation (2). Each data point is the average  
520 germination percentage of four (Exp 1) or three (Exp 2) replicates of 20 seeds each.

521

522

523 Fig. 3. Temperature required to obtain 99% germination reduction in comparison to  
524 untreated seeds ( $ET_{99}$ ) plotted against length×width of the seed (A) or 1000-seed weight  
525 (B).  $ET_{99}$  data refer to Exp 2. Regression significance ( $P$ -value) is 0.01287 and 0.01428  
526 for A and B, respectively.

527

528

## Figures

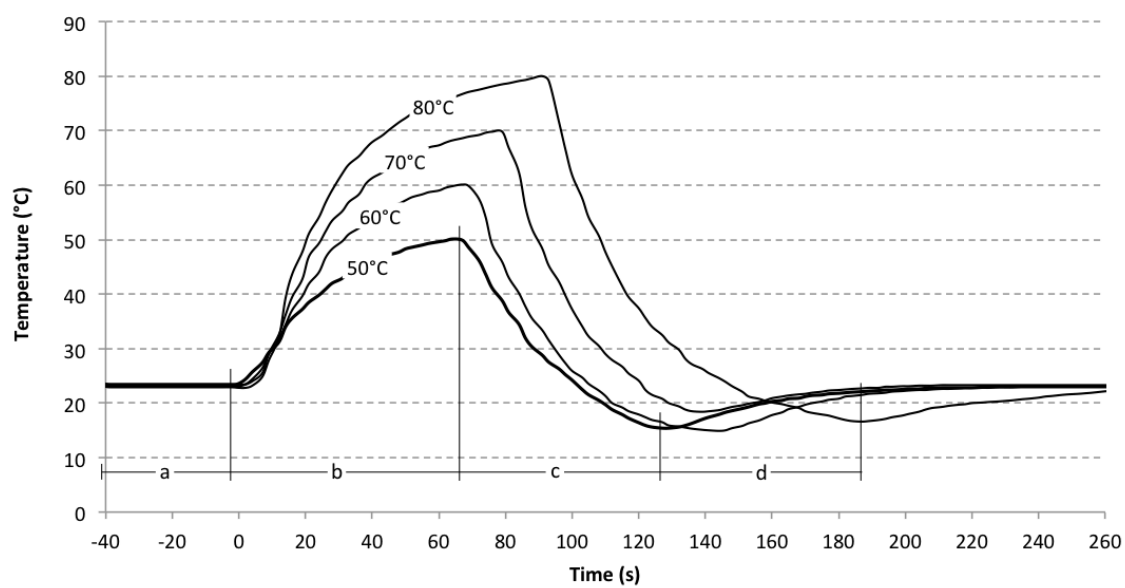
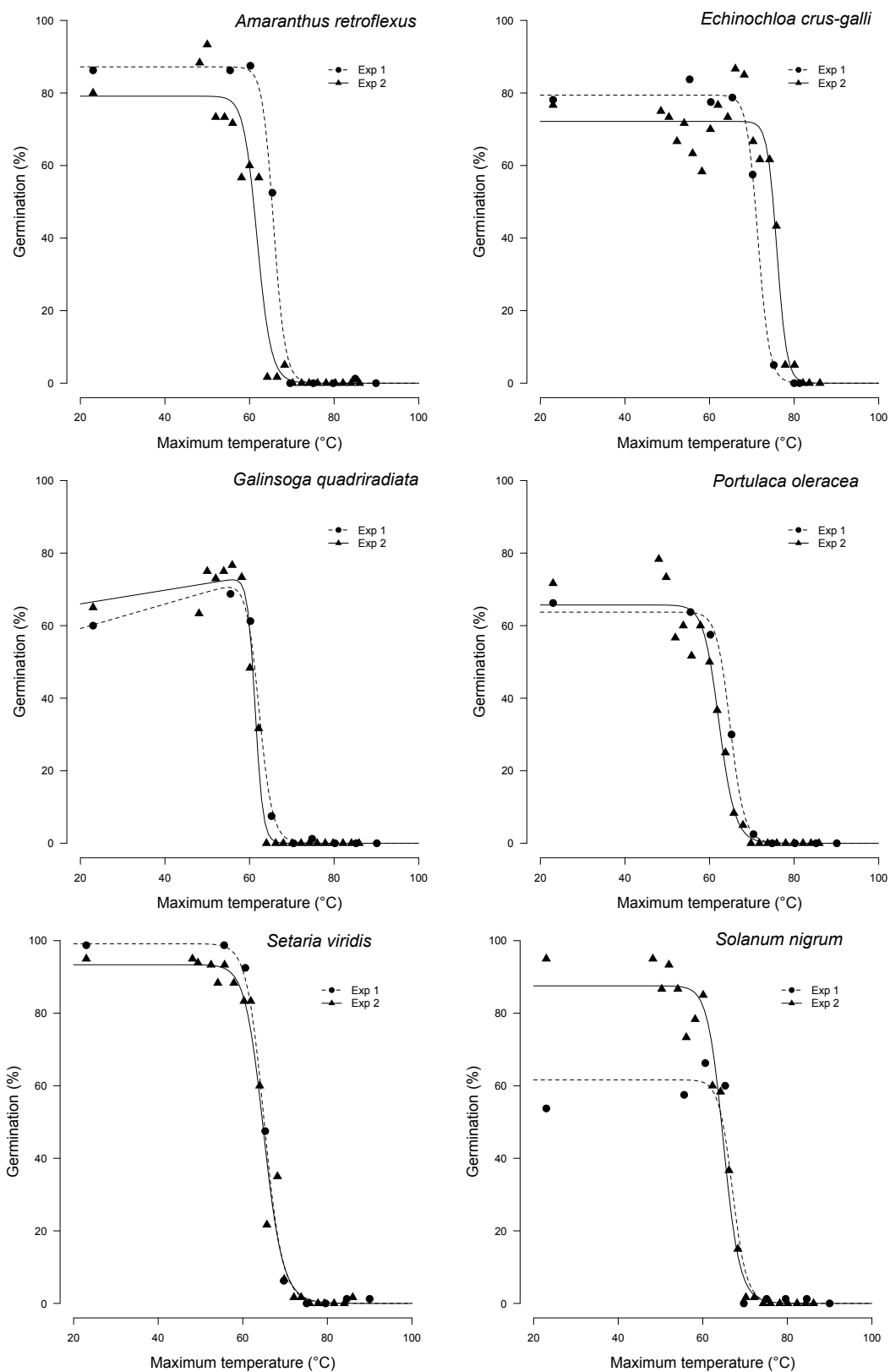
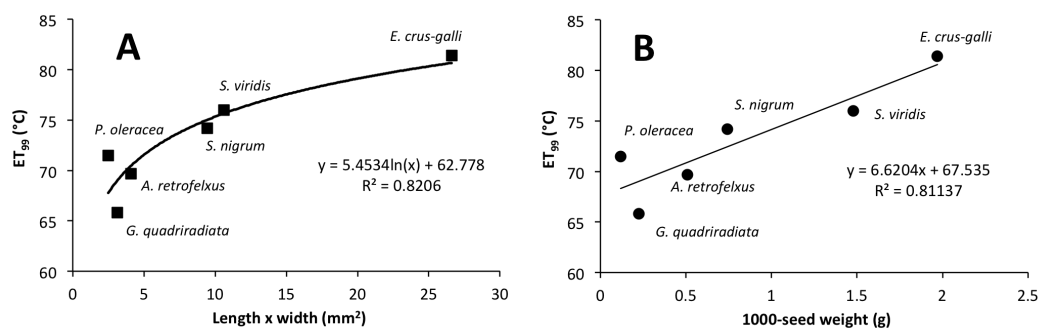


Figure 1

529



530 Figure 2



531 Figure 3.