

**(*Sechium edule* (Jacq.) Sw.),
(*Momordica charantia* L.) (Cucumis metuliferus
E. Mey ex Naudin)**

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**Some Quality Properties of Tropical Cucurbits Chayote
(*Sechium edule* (Jacq.) Sw.), Bitter Melon (*Momordica
charantia* L.) and Kiwano (*Cucumis metuliferus* E. Mey)
Produced in the Temperate Climate Conditions
of North Macedonia**

Trajche Dimitrovski¹, Danica Andreevska², Dobro Andov²,
Natasha Gjorgovska³, Vesna Levkov^{3*}

¹Institute of Agriculture, "S . Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje, 1000 Skopje,
Republic of North Macedonia

²Field Crops Department, Institute of Agriculture, "S . Cyril and Methodius" University
in Skopje, 1000 Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

³Institute of Animal Science, "S . Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje, 1000
Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

*E-mail: levkovv@yahoo.com

Original scientific paper

SUMMARY

(*Cucurbitaceae*)

- The tropical crops chayote, bitter melon and kiwano (*Cucurbitaceae*) were cultivated under the temperate continental sub-Mediterranean climate of Kochani region, North Macedonia. The fresh fruits were tested for their physicochemical characteristics (water content, total dry

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,
Salmonella spp., *L.*
monocytogenes, *E. coli*/Enterobacteriaceae,

4.47)

L. monocytogenes, *Salmonella* spp.
coli

Enterobacteriaceae

(3626 cfu/g),

(3084 cfu/g).

Momordica
metuliferus,

: *Sechium edule*,
charantia, *Cucumis*

content, total soluble solids and pH) and
- microbiological quality using selective
- media for *Salmonella* spp., *L.*
- *monocytogenes*, *E. coli*/Enterobacteriaceae,
- yeast and molds and plate count agar for
- total number of bacteria.

- All parameters were tested in 5
- replications. The physicochemical
- properties of kiwano (total soluble solids
- of 4.07 %Brix and pH of 4.47) and bitter
- melon (total soluble solids of 3.77 %Brix)
- were similar to reports from other
- regions/countries, while the chayote had a
- similar water content and pH but lower
- total soluble solids obtained in our
- conditions. Concerning the microbiological
- quality, *L. monocytogenes*, *Salmonella*
- spp. and *E. coli* were not detected in any
- of the samples. Non-coli
- *Enterobacteriaceae* were found in kiwano
- and bitter melon.

- The highest average plate count was
- found in kiwano (3626 cfu/g), while the
- highest number of yeasts and molds in
- bitter melon (3084 cfu/g). The results
- suggest that chayote, bitter melon and
- kiwano crop with good fruit quality can be
- produced under the temperate climate
- conditions of North Macedonia.

- Still, the chayote had inferior total soluble
- solids as compared to the crop produced
- in tropical and subtropical regions.

- The research in these crops should
- continue in regard to the suitability of the
- different climate-vegetation-soil regions
- for their cultivation, and specific cultivation
- techniques in each species in relation to
- fruit yield and quality.

Key words: *Sechium edule*,
Momordica charantia, *Cucumis*
metuliferus, microbiological criteria;
physicochemical properties

INTRODUCTION

Sw.),
Mey)
charantia L.)

(*Sechium edule* (Jacq.
Cucumis metuliferus E.
Momordica

Cucurbitaceae (

(Newstrom, 1990; Newstrom, 1991).

(Kirkbride, 1993).

(Lim, 2012).

(Schaefer and Renner, 2010).

(Chomicki et al., 2019).

(Wannang et al.,
2007; Kubola and Siriamornpun, 2008;
Joseph and Jini, 2013; Anyanwu et al.,
2014; Jia et al., 2017; Mzena et al., 2018;
Parra et al., 2018; Riviello-Flores et al.
2018; Vieira et al., 2019).

(2008).

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Chayote (*Sechium edule* (Jacq.)
Sw.), kiwano (*Cucumis metuliferus* E.
Mey) and bitter melon (*Momordica
charantia* L.) are crops of tropical origin
belonging to the botanical family
Cucurbitaceae (cucurbits or gourd family)
predominantly grown in the tropics and
subtropics. The chayote (mirliton squash)
originates from Mexico and Central
America. It is most popular in Latin
America and grown in the tropical and
subtropical regions (Newstrom, 1990;
Newstrom, 1991). The kiwano (horned
melon) naturally occurs thru Africa (sub-
Saharan regions) and Southwest Asia
(Yemen) (Kirkbride, 1993). It is
commercially grown in Kenya, New
Zealand, France and Israel (Lim, 2012).
The bitter melon (bitter gourd or balsam
pear) originates from Africa (Schaefer and
Renner, 2010). Its domestication is
unclear (Africa or India) and today is most
extensively used in Asian cuisines
(Chomicki et al., 2019).

Recently, these crops are gaining
more attention due to their reported
nutritional and bio-functional properties
(Wannang et al., 2007; Kubola and
Siriamornpun, 2008; Joseph and Jini,
2013; Anyanwu et al., 2014; Jia et al.,
2017; Mzena et al., 2018; Parra et al.,
2018; Riviello-Flores et al. 2018; Vieira et
al., 2019).

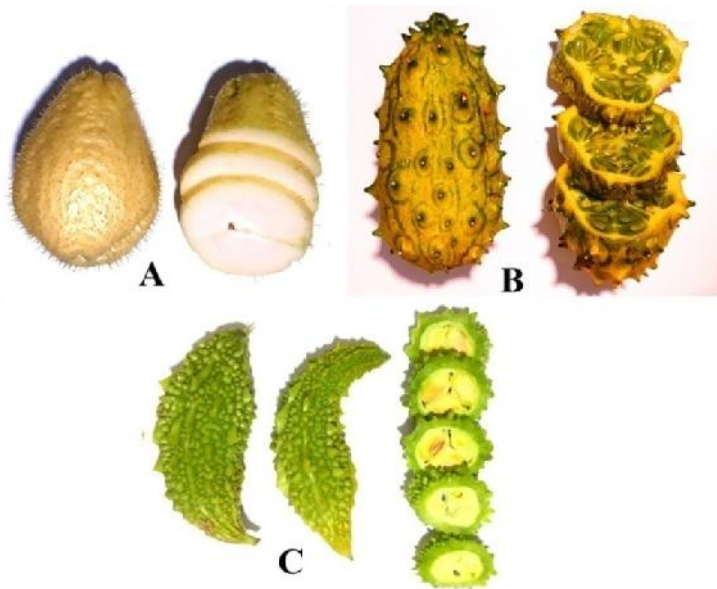
In North Macedonia, these three
crops are not well known, and are not
commonly cultivated as a commercial
crop or a garden plant. Their cultivation is
isolated and local, on a small scale by
certain individuals/ farmers for the local
market. None of the three species is listed
in the National variety list published by the
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water
Economy of the Republic of North
Macedonia (2008). The chayote was
introduced in the region at the end of the
1990's decade, when it was randomly
grown as a garden (backyard) specimen
(author's notation), while the kiwano and

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 : (*Sechium edule* (Jacq.
 Sw.), (*Cucumis metuliferus* E.
 Mey) (*Momordica*
charantia L.) 1.
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 (Filipovski at al., 1996)
 BSk (, ,)
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 (1980–2016 .) 1-km (Beck
 et al., 2018).
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bitter melon are know from the past several years, with some on-line popular reports. Since little to no scientific information on these new exotic species cultivated in North Macedonia is available, a study was conducted in order to investigate the food safety (microbiological quality) and physicochemical characteristics of these cucurbits produced in the climatic conditions of North Macedonia.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The materials used for this study were fruits of the three cucurbit species: chayote (*Sechium edule* (Jacq.) Sw.), kiwano (*Cucumis metuliferus* E. Mey) and bitter melon (*Momordica charantia* L.) shown on Figure 1. The physicochemical and microbiological analyses of chayote and kiwano were performed on ripen fruits. Because the bitter melon is used as a vegetable while still green (unripe), the analyses in this species were performed on unripe fruits. The fruits of the three species were grown on a private property during the vegetative season of 2019 located in the region of Kochani, which belongs to the temperate continental sub-Mediterranean climate belt (Filipovski at al., 1996) or BSk (steppe, arid, cold) climate according to the new global maps of the Köppen-Geiger climate classification for the present-day (1980–2016) at 1-km resolution (Beck et al., 2018). No pesticides (fungicides and insecticides) were applied during the cultivation.



.1.

Fig. 1. Fruits of the examined tropical cucurbit species

A- (*Sechium edule* (Jacq.) Sw.), B- (*Cucumis metuliferus* E. Mey) C- (*Momordica charantia* L.)

A- chayote (*Sechium edule* (Jacq.) Sw.), B- kiwano (*Cucumis metuliferus* E. Mey) and C- bitter melon (*Momordica charantia* L.)

Physicochemical analyses

The following physicochemical properties were investigated: water content, total dry content, total soluble solids and pH. The water content and total dry content in each species were determined by drying 5 fruit samples from different fruits in air-oven at 105 °C to constant weight and were expressed as % of the fresh fruit weight.

The total soluble solids and pH were determined in 5 liquid samples in each species, prepared from different fruits processed on a blender, after which the samples were strained and the liquid (fruit juice) collected.

The total soluble solids (TSS) are an important quality parameter used to indicate sweetness of fresh and processed horticultural food products, in laboratories for research and by industry to determine marketing standards (Magwazaa and Opara, 2015).

and Opara, 2015). TSS % Brix, (Kruss). p pH (Testo).	(Magwazaa	The TSS in this study was measured in %Brix using digital refractometer (Kruss). The pH was determined using digital pH-measuring instrument (Testo).
		<i>Microbiological analyses</i> The fruits used for microbiological analyses were harvested and taken to the laboratory, where they were washed with tap water and afterward washed twice with distilled water. No surface disinfection was performed.
	(15).	The analyses were performed on five samples of each of the three species (15 in total). Each of the five samples of chayote, bitter gourd and kiwano were prepared from different fruit. The fruits were cut in small species and measured under sterile conditions. 25 g of each sample was put in a 225 ml sterile buffered peptone solution and homogenized in a stomacher (Interscience, model BagMixer). The subsequent dilutions were made by using the sterile buffered peptone solution. The total number of aerobic mesophilic bacteria was detected using the plate count agar (PCA) after 24 hours incubation at 37 °C. Enterobacteria and <i>Escherichia coli</i> were detected using selective chromogenic medium for direct enumeration of <i>Enterrobacteriaceae</i> and <i>E. coli</i> (REBBECA agar) after incubation at 37 °C for 24 hours. <i>Salmonella</i> screening was performed using highly selective chromogenic medium for <i>Salmonella</i> detection (24 hours at 37 °C). The presence of <i>Listeria monocitogenes</i> was examined by using ALOA- selective chorogenic medium (agar) for <i>Listeria</i> according to Ottaviani and Agosti (24 hours at 37 °C). Yeasts and molds were detected and enumerated by using yeast extract glucose chloramphenicol (YCG) plate after 3-5 days of incubation at 25 °C. All media used were ready-to-use plates (BioMérieux). An overview of the media
. 25 g 225 ml BagMixer).	(Interscience,	
24 Enterobacteria	(PCA) 37° <i>Escherichia coli</i>	
<i>Enterrobacteriaceae</i> (REBBECA) 37°	<i>E. coli</i> 24	
(24 37°). <i>Listeria monocitogenes</i>		
() ALOA Ottaviani Agosti (24 37°C).	<i>Listeria</i>	
(YCG) 3-5	25° (BioMérieux).	

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used for detection and enumeration of the studied microorganisms is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Overview of the mediums used for detection of the specific microorganisms

Parameter	Medium	Method of detection	Presumptive positive result
Total plate count	PCA	Non selective medium which enables bacterial growth	Growth of bacterial colony forming units
Enterobacteria	REBECCA	REBECCA REBECCA EB supplement	/Pink to red colonies
<i>Escherichia coli</i>	REBECCA	-D- - D-glucuronidase activity	/Blue colonies with or without blue halo
<i>Salmonella</i> spp.	Salmonella chromogenic agar	8- C8-esterase activity	Pale pink to mauve colonies
<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>	ALOA	- / -glucosidase and phosphatidylinositol-specific phospholipase C activity	Blue to blue-green colonies with halo
/Molds	YGC agar	(Selective medium for fungi (yeasts and molds)	Growth of mold colony forming units
/Yeast	YGC agar	(Selective medium for fungi (yeasts and molds)	Growth of yeast colony forming units

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2
(94,76%),
(5,24%)
TSS (2,10% Brix).
(88,67%),
(11,33%)
(6,45)
TSS (4,07% Brix)
pH (4,47)).

Some physicochemical properties of the examined crops are shown on Table 2. The chayote had the highest water content (94.76%), the lowest total dry content (5.24%) and the lowest TSS (2.10%Brix). The lowest water content (88.67%), the highest total dry content (11.33%) and the highest pH value (6.45) were found in bitter melon, while the kiwano contained the highest TSS (4.07% Brix) and lowest pH value (4.47).

While the water content and the pH of chayote produced in the conditions of North Macedonia were similar to the reports from other regions, the total soluble solids obtained in our conditions

(Ekanayake et al., 2007; Mishra and Das, 2015; Oloan and Jose, 2017).

(var. *albus spinosum*).
 (TSS pH) Souza et al. (2006) Antunes et al. (2014). Benzioni et al. (1993) 4,06 4,89, TSS 4,02% 6,19%
 Bharati et al. (2018) TSS 3,64 5,58 ° Brix (3,77% Brix) Mallikarjunarao et al. (2018) - 2.27 °Brix 4.75°Brix 3.54°Brix, Kumari et al. (2018) - 4.450% 6.100%. Aminah and Anna (2011).

were lower (Ekanayake et al., 2007; Mishra and Das, 2015; Oloan and Jose, 2017). Still, it should be noted that most of the reports on chayote do not involve the variety tested in this study - the yellow spiny chayote (var. *albus spinosum*).

The physicochemical properties of kiwano (TSS and pH) were similar to those reported by Souza et al. (2006) and Antunes et al. (2014). Similarly, according to Benzioni et al. (1993) the pH in kiwano ranged from 4.06 to 4.89, while the TSS ranged from 4.02% in mature green fruits to 6.19% in mature yellow-orange fruits.

According to Bharati et al. (2018) the TSS in bitter melon ranged from 3.64 to 5.58°Brix depending on the foliar feeding. In this study, TSS in bitter melon (3.77%Brix) was in the range reported by Mallikarjunarao et al. (2018) – 2.27° Brix to 4.75°Brix with a mean of 3.54°Brix, but lower compared to the results by Kumari et al. (2018) - 4.450% to 6.100%. The pH of bitter melon in this study was higher in comparison to Aminah and Anna (2011).

2. (TDC),

Table 2. Physicochemical properties of the examined fruits: water content, TDC (total dry content), TSS (total soluble solids) and pH value

	Water content (%)	TDC (%)	TSS (%Brix)	pH
/Chayote	94.76±0.32	5.24±0.32	2.10±0.44	6.40±0.06
/Bitter melon	88.67±1.55	11.33±1.55	3.77±0.38	6.45±0.13
/Kiwano	91.98±0.49	8.02±0.49	4.07±1.00	4.47±0.20

3. *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella* spp. *Listeria monocytogenes*
 (, 2008), *Salmonella* spp. *Listeria monocytogenes*

The results of the microbiological analysis are presented at Table 3. *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella* spp. and *Listeria monocytogenes* were not detected in any of the examined fruits. According to the Rulebook for specific food safety requirements regarding the microbiological criteria (Official gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2008), no *Salmonella* spp. and *Listeria monocytogenes* should be found in fresh

1000 cfu/g ().

E. coli 100

Clostridium perfringens -

Enterobacteriaceae (*E.coli Salmonella*),

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2008). Enterobacteriaceae,

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, Enterobacteriaceae

Enterobacteriaceae

2 5- - 10 cfu/g

15 cfu/g (

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-

(84 cfu/g).

-

(3626 cfu/g),

-

cfu/g) - 3084 cfu/g), (2766

(318 cfu/g)

cfu/g) -

(100 cfu/g) (40

cfu/g),

-

(16 cfu/g).

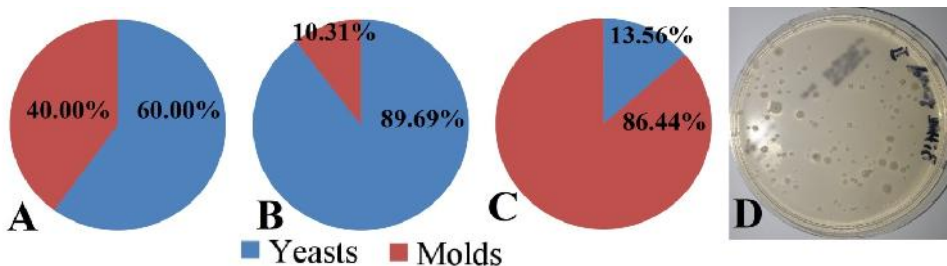
fruits and vegetables placed on the market. The limits for *E. coli* are set at 100 to 1000 cfu/g (examined in the process of production). The other two criteria with defined limits at the production stage are coagulase positive staphylococci and *Clostridium perfringens* - these two criteria were not evaluated in this study.

So far, no limits are set for the Enterobacteriaceae (excluding *E.coli* and *Salmonella*), the total number of aerobic mesophilic bacteria and fungi (yeasts and molds) present in fresh fruit (Official gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2008).

The non-coli Enterobacteriaceae in the species examined in this trial were low. In chayote Enterobacteriaceae were not detected, while in kiwano and bitter melon Enterobacteriaceae were detected in 2 out of the 5 samples - 10 cfu/g in kiwano and 15 cfu/g in bitter melon (average of the two positive results in each species).

The lowest number of aerobic mesophilic bacteria was found in bitter melon (84 cfu/g). The kiwano fruits, where the highest average number of aerobic mesophilic bacteria was found (3626 cfu/g), also had the highest difference within individual replications and the highest standard deviation.

Regarding the fungal content, the highest average values for the total fungal count (yeast and molds - 3084 cfu/g), yeasts (2766 cfu/g) and molds (318 cfu/g) were detected in bitter melon. The lowest total fungal count (100 cfu/g) and molds (40 cfu/g) were found in chayote, while the kiwano fruit contained the lowest yeasts number (16 cfu/g).



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(%) : A- , B- , C- , D-

Fig. 2. The content of yeast and molds in the fungal flora of the examined fruits (%) : A- chayote, B- bitter gourd, C- kiwano, D- growth of fungi (yeasts and molds) on selective media

Sw.),
Mey)
charantia L.)

(*Sechium edule* (Jacq.
Cucumis metuliferus E.
Momordica

CONCLUSIONS

The current study demonstrates the potential for cultivation of the tropical cucurbit species chayote (*Sechium edule* (Jacq.) Sw.), kiwano (*Cucumis metuliferus* E. Mey) and bitter melon (*Momordica charantia* L.) under the temperate climate conditions of North Macedonia. The fruits produced in this study showed satisfactory results concerning the microbiological quality of the final product ready for consumption. Regarding the physicochemical properties, the kiwano and bitter melon had similar quality as compared to the crop produced in other countries, while the chayote had a somewhat inferior content of total soluble solids. Further studies should be performed in order to investigate the suitability of the different climate-vegetation-soil regions of North Macedonia for the cultivation of these tropical/ subtropical crops, and to evaluate and determine the most suitable production techniques in each species in relation to fruit yield and quality.

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