

1 **Selection for resistance against root pathogens in a pea composite cross**

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17 **Abstract**

18 The possibility of improving resistance in pea against the root pathogen *Aphanomyces*
19 *euteiches* using composite cross as a breeding and selection method was examined. In
20 order to maintain acceptable agricultural features and high yield 6 out of the 8
21 parental varieties in the present composite-cross were commercially grown varieties.
22 Populations of the composite cross were grown up to five generations with selection
23 pressure in soil heavily infested with pea root pathogens or without selection pressure
24 on soil free of pea root pathogens. Yield of populations of the F₉ and F₁₀ generations
25 of the composite cross grown with selection pressure was on average 35% higher than
26 that of the population obtained without selection pressure as well as the average yield
27 of the 8 parentals of the composite cross, which were of similar magnitude. In healthy
28 soil the yield was overall higher than in the pathogen-infested soil, but yield did not
29 differ between the populations from the composite cross with and without selection
30 pressure, which were also similar to the average yield of the 8 different parentals.
31 Recombinant inbred lines (RILs) randomly selected from the F₁₀ population with
32 selection pressure developed 23% less root rot than the corresponding F₁₀ population
33 without selection pressure, when grown in field soil heavily infested with pea root
34 pathogens. Surprisingly, greenhouse pot experiments with pure cultures of the pea
35 root pathogen *A. euteiches* resulted in higher root disease, in RILs from populations
36 with selection pressure than from corresponding RILs without selection pressure.
37 Problems related to greenhouse screening for resistance is discussed as well as the
38 possibilities of using composite cross as a method to improve resistance against root
39 diseases in grain legumes.
40 **Keywords:** organic farming, root pathogen, plant breeding, legumes

41 **Introduction**

42 In organic farming, soya and other protein sources play an important part in the
43 production of pigs and poultry. To meet the requirement for protein in a feed self
44 sufficient-organic farm with a high proportion of monogastric animals, the proportion
45 of grain legumes in rotation should be at least 30% to 50% (ref). Grain legumes, e.g.
46 pea (*Pisum sativum*), faba beans (*Vicia faba*) and lupins (*Lupinus* sp.) can
47 complement cereals in animal feed. Besides being a valuable protein source, these
48 grain legumes benefit the farming system via biological nitrogen fixation and by
49 being a break-crop for cereal diseases. Therefore limitations, which reduce the
50 maximum ratio of grain legumes crops in the organic rotation as well as their
51 productivity, are direct limitations for the expansion of organic farming (ref).

52 The biggest obstacle for an increased proportion of grain legumes in the
53 organic rotation is presently diseases, which are accumulated in the system over time,
54 especially soil and seed borne pathogens (ref). Pea root rot caused by *Aphanomyces*
55 *euteiches*, is often regarded as the most destructive pathogen of pea (*Pisum sativum*)
56 in areas with humid climates (Kraft and Pflieger, 2001), including Southern
57 Scandinavia (Persson et al, 1997). In areas with longest tradition for pea growing, 10-
58 20% of the fields are not suitable for pea production due to high levels of natural
59 infestation of pea root pathogens (ref). It is expected that at least 20 years is necessary
60 before pea growing can be taken up again in these natural infested fields (ref). This
61 persistence of legume pathogens is therefore a threat in organic farming systems
62 because the biological fixation of atmospheric nitrogen is a fundamental process for
63 maintaining soil fertility.

64 World wide different breeding methods have been employed to obtain plant
65 resistance against root rot pathogens (refs), however as several genes are involved in

66 resistance against *A. euteiches* it is difficult to obtain resistant varieties (refs). Various
67 breeding methods are used when introducing resistance genes into highly adapted
68 material (refs). Methods involve backcrossing, where defined genes are transferred,
69 recurrent selection involving repeated cycles of inter-mating and selection often used
70 in pyramiding genes in out breeding species and composite crosses used in self
71 pollinating cereals (). In this project the “composite cross” method developed by
72 Suneson (1956), will be evaluated as a tool for selecting breeding lines with improved
73 resistance. In this method the F₁ progeny from crosses of different plant genotypes
74 with agronomic important features are bulked and subsequently exposed to selection
75 in successive natural cropping environments. This breeding method seems to be
76 particularly well fitted for low input systems such as organic farming (Phillips and
77 Wolfe, 2005; Murphy et al, 2005).

78 The objective of the present study was to examine the possibility of using
79 “composite cross” as a breeding- and selection method to achieve improved resistance
80 in pea against the root pathogens focusing on *Aphanomyces euteiches*.

81

82 **Materials and methods**

83 Description of the pea composite cross

84 A composite cross was created with 8 different pea cultivars (Table 1) differing in
85 resistance to the root pathogens *A. euteiches* and *F. oxysporum* and also differing in
86 other agronomic characteristics following the crossing scheme in Table 2. Crosses
87 were carried out in the greenhouse during the winters 1993 and 1994 and F₁ seed
88 grown till F₂ during the same period. It was attempted that each F₂ population
89 consisted of at least 400 seeds. The F₂ were grown in the field and harvested bulk for
90 each population. Each population was divided in two, and grown for the next 3 to 5

91 generations under two different selection regimes. One populations was grown under
92 heavy selection pressure of soil borne pathogens in a field cropped continuously with
93 pea for 7 years. The other population was grown on land free of pea soil borne
94 pathogens. F₇ populations were harvested in the field in 1998 and stored. Stored seed
95 were sown in plots in 2002. From each population 150 F₇ plants were taken at
96 random, forming the recombinant inbred lines (RILs) for the further studies.
97 Remaining part of plots were harvested bulk for each population. RIL's of the two
98 final composite lines were multiplied in rows in the field in 2003, a season
99 characterised by severe attacks of *Mycosphaerella* that affected seed quality. In the
100 winter 2003/04 all populations from 2002 and the eight parentals were multiplied
101 under disease free conditions in the southern hemisphere to establish seed populations
102 of equal germination capacity for trials 2004. Trials 2005 was sown with seed
103 harvested in trials 2004, representing a further cycle of selection.

104

105 Field trials

106 Yield

107 In 2004 and 2005 three identical trials were sown on land with varying levels of
108 infestation with soil borne root pathogens. Each trial consisted of the eight parentals,
109 the 14 populations and 3 further commercial control varieties sown in 3 replicates in
110 an alpha-design. Sowing density was 65 germinating seeds per m² sown with an
111 Oyord drill. Trials were treated with pre- and post emergence herbicides to control
112 weeds and when necessary with insecticides as well. No fungicides were used. The
113 disease severity was controlled using plants in the border plots, which were scored for
114 root rot.

115

116 Evaluation of tolerance to soil borne pathogens in RILs

117 From each of the composite cross populations 150 RILs lines were selected at random

118 in F₇. These lines together with the parental lines in 2004 were sown in small plots on

119 heavily infested land. Each plot consisted of one 1-m row with seeds sown with a

120 pneumatic precision drill to space plants 8 cm apart given 12 plants per plot. The trial

121 had two replicates of each RIL and the set of parentals was included seven times. On

122 the 19th and the 26th of July the rows were scored by a scale 0 to 5 for yellowing of

123 above ground parts. The degree of yellowing was taken as a measure of attack of soil

124 borne pathogens on below ground plant parts. RIL's were again tested in the dirty plot

125 field in 2005 using the same design as in 2004. DSI was measured three times during

126 the growing season; 24th June, 3rd and 18th of July.

127

128 Green house pot experiments

129 Screening RILs for *A. euteiches* susceptibility

130 RILs from 124 lines from (F?) populations obtained with and without selection

131 pressure were screened for susceptibility towards *A. euteiches* Dreschler (ATCC

132 2016). The experiment was performed with a randomized block design each with 31

133 RILs from the two populations over a four-day period. Each RIL had two replicates.


134 Sandy loam soil from Research Centre Flakkebjerg was partially sterilised by

135 irradiation (10 kGy, 10MeV electron beam) and mixed with quartz sand obtaining a

136 ratio of 1:3 soil:sand (w/w). Basal nutrients were mixed into the soil in the following

137 amount (mg kg⁻¹): xxxxxx.138 Oospore-based inoculum of *Aphanomyces euteiches* Dreschler (ATCC 2016

139 84), was produced by growing the fungus in oatmeal broth (0.5% oatmeal in

140 demineralised water) at 20°C in the dark for eight weeks. Thereafter, the suspension
141 with mycelium and oospores was homogenised for two minutes in a blender and
142 filtered twice through gauze. The suspension was washed with a sterile dilute salt
143 solution (Fuller and Jaworski, 1987) three times by centrifugation at 3000 rpm for four
144 min. and the oospores were counted in a haemocytometer. Finally, the suspension
145 containing oospores  allowed to dry on 100 g quartz sand, and thereafter mixed
146 homogeneously into the soil:sand mix resulting in a concentration of approximately
147 400 oospores g⁻¹ soil. A similar amount of quartz sand without oospores was added to
148 the treatments without *A. euteiches*. Seeds were surface sterilised in 1.5% NaOCl for
149 eight minutes, washed three times in demineralised water, pre-germinated for three
150 days, and sown at a depth of three cm with 14 seeds per 1.25 l pot (12 cm diameter, 14
151 cm height), containing 1600 g soil:sand mix, both with and without fungal inoculum.
152 At sowing, 2 ml of a dense *Rhizobium leguminosorum* (Risø strain 18a) culture was
153 added to each pea seed. *Rhizobium* was cultured in sterile yeast mannitol broth (g l⁻¹):
154 K₂HPO₄ × 3H₂O (0.66), MgSO₄ × 7H₂O (0.20), NaCl (0.10), D-Mannitol (10.0) yeast
155 extract (0.40); and pH was set to 8.0.

156 Pea seedlings were thinned to ten per pot after five days. Plants were
157 maintained in a greenhouse November 2003. Temperature and light settings were 20
158 °C and 16 hours light / 24 hours throughout the experiment. Natural daylight was
159 supplemented with a photosynthetic active radiation of 150 μmole m⁻² s⁻¹ provided by
160 Osram daylight lamps. The pots were placed in a temperature-regulated container
161 providing a constant soil temperature of 20°C. Each pot was watered to 95% field
162 capacity at least every second day.

163 Plants were harvested three weeks after sowing. At harvest, plants were gently
164 removed from the soil, washed and visually examined for disease severity of the root

165 (discoloration) by scoring percentage area of the respective plant parts with symptoms.

166 The shoot was cut off just above the cotyledons, dried (80°C for 24 h) and weighed.

167

168 Screening RILs for *F. oxysporum* susceptibility

169 RILs from 150 lines from (F?) populations obtained with and without selection

170 pressure were screened for susceptibility towards *F. oxysporum* ? Race 1 (isolate etc).

171 The experiment was performed with a randomized block design each with 36-37 RILs

172 from the two populations each day over a four-day period. Each RIL had two

173 replicates each with five plants in individual planting holes.

174 Inoculum of *F. oxysporum* was produced on Czapek Dox Broth (35 g l⁻¹) with

175 a CDAZ solution with the following nutrients (mg l⁻¹): CuSO₄ × 5H₂O (0.22), MnCl₂

176 × 4H₂O (1), ZnCl₂ (1), Ca(NO₃)₂ × 4 H₂O (0.1), (NH₄)₆ Mo₇O₂₄ (0.2). Five 1x1

177 cm agar blocks from a 2-weeks old *F. oxysporum* culture on potato dextrose agar with

178 novobiocin was transferred to a flask the Czapek Dox Broth which were incubated at

179 room temperature (approx. 20 °C) in darkness for five days on a vertical rotary shaker

180 (92 rpm) after which spores were harvested and inoculation suspensions with 10⁶

181 spores ml⁻¹ were produced.

182 Seeds were surface sterilised in 1.5% NaOCl for eight minutes, washed three

183 times in demineralised water, pre-germinated for three days. Seeds from each RILs

184 were sown in five separate planting holes in the trays and each tray consisted of

185 7 x 5 holes of which six rows were sown with six different RILs and one row with a

186 positive control with the highly susceptible pea variety Julia. Each planting hole

187 contained approx. 100 ml sterile vermiculite.

188 Plants were maintained in a greenhouse in November 2005 where temperature

189 and light settings were 20 °C and 16 hours light / 24 hours throughout the experiment.

190 Natural daylight was supplemented with a photosynthetic active radiation of 150
191 $\mu\text{mole m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ provided by Osram daylight lamps. Each tray was placed in a separate
192 trayholder and watered every twice a week or when needed. When the plants were
193 two weeks old their roots were trimmed by cutting approx. 1/3 of the root system and
194 subsequently the roots were dipped in a spore suspension of *F. oxysporum* for 30
195 minutes. After additional 4 weeks all plants were scored for disease using a disease
196 index based on percent wilting of the shoot of the five plants from each RIL.

197

198 **Statistics**

199 Multifactor analysis of variance, using General Linear Model, were used to analyse
200 data, using SAS 8e (SAS Institute Inc.1999)

201

202 **Results**

203 Field experiments

204

205 Yield

206 Yield in 2004 and 2005 in plots with heavy root pathogen infestation levels obtained
207 from the F₉ and F₁₀ seed generation, respectively, of the composite cross population
208 with selection pressure was on average 34.5 % higher than the composite cross
209 population without selection pressure and the average of the 8 composite cross
210 parentals (Figure 2). Yield from the plots with intermediate root pathogen infestation
211 and from plots with healthy soil did not differ between two composite cross
212 populations and the parentals (Figure 2). Average yield was highest in healthy soil in
213 both years, except in 2004 where the average yields from the plot with intermediate
214 root pathogen infestation was similar to that of healthy soil. In 2005 however, yield

215 from plots with intermediate root pathogen infestation was intermediate; in between
216 yield from plots with heavy root pathogen infestation and that obtained from plots
217 with healthy soil (Figure 2).

218

219 Disease index

220 The average DSI based on measurements of yellowing of the shoot obtained from
221 plots grown at the three different levels of root pathogen infestation increased with
222 increasing levels of infestation (Figure 3). In soil with heavy pathogen infestation,
223 DSI was lowest in the composite cross population obtained with selection pressure
224 and the parentals, and furthermore the DSI of the composite cross population obtained
225 without selection had a lower DSI than the average of the 8 parentals (Figure 3). In
226 healthy soil no difference was found between the three different populations. In soil
227 with intermediate levels of pathogen infestation, the DSI of the two composite cross
228 populations with and without selection pressure was similar, but lower than that of the
229 average of the 8 parentals (Figure 3).

230

231 Field screening of RILs in a dirty plot

232 The average score for RILs originating from the population grown under selection
233 pressure was lower than for that grown without selection pressure, although this
234 difference was only significant in 2005 (Fig 4), where the DSI from RILs with
235 selection was 23% lower than that of RILs without selection (Figure 4).

236

237 Greenhouse experiments

238 Screening of RILs against *A. euteiches* and *F. oxysporum*

239 The average score of RILs screened for *A. euteiches* susceptibility was 15.7% higher
240 in RILs originating from the population grown under selection pressure than that of
241 RILs grown without selection pressure (Figure 5), which also coincided with a lower
242 shoot dry weight of RILs originating from the population grown under selection
243 pressure than that of RILs grown without selection pressure (data not shown). The
244 average score of RILs screened for *F. oxysporum* susceptibility was 11.7% higher in
245 RILs originating from the population grown under selection pressure than that of RILs
246 grown without selection pressure, however this difference was not significant (Figure
247 6).

248

249 **Discussion**

250 To our knowledge this is the first report on a pea composite cross breeding for *A.*
251 *euteiches* resistance. Our findings that the composite cross developed with selection
252 pressure gave lower disease development and higher yield is similar to the results
253 obtained with soy bean composite crosses in relation to *Phytophthora* root rot and soy
254 bean cyst nematodes (Hartwig et al 1985; Degago and Cavines, 1987).

255 Composite cross populations can provide dynamic gene pools, which may be
256 usefull in low-input and /or organic agriculture with unpredictable stress conditions
257 caused by pests and pathogens (Phillips and Wolfe, 2005), but selection against other
258 agronomic important traits needs to be considered. In the present study the pea
259 composite cross, obtained with selection pressure, performed similar as the parentals
260 in uninfested soil in terms of yield.

261 In barley it has been suggested that 15 generations of natural selection is
262 needed to develop populations with improved agronomic fitness (Suneson, 1956). In
263 the present pea composite cross improved resistance was achieved already after four

264 generations. However, in the fifth generation the composite cross population did not
265 increase yield. Hence, it would be interesting to follow how more selection cycles
266 would effect the composite cross populations in terms of both disease resistance and
267 other agronomic traits. Results from Degago and Caviness (1987) indicate that the
268 bulk breeding method for disease resistance in soybean is more effective when there is
269 constant year-to-year selection pressure. In the present study the root rot levels was
270 overall higher in 2005 than in 2004, which may explain this difference between years.

271 Different screening techniques of resistance to root diseases in cool season
272 food legumes has been reviewed by Infantino et al (2006), who emphasized the
273 importance of protocol standardization. Despite of high level of standardization used
274 in our protocols we obtained contrasting results from screening RILs for root disease
275 resistance in the “dirty plot” in the field and in the greenhouse screening. Similarly,
276 Pilet-Nayel et al (2005) reported low correlation between field and greenhouse
277 screening of *A. euteiches* resistance, but also good correlation between field and
278 greenhouse screening for *A. euteiches* resistance has been reported (Moussart et al,
279 2001). In our study, the *A. euteiches* isolate used for the greenhouse screening was a
280 laboratory pet, but another isolate of *A. euteiches* originating from the “dirty plot”
281 used in the field screening, behaved similar to the laboratory pet isolate (data not
282 shown).

283 Simulation of natural environmental conditions is difficult especially if not
284 using field soil in the greenhouse tests. One of the main arguments of using
285 greenhouse screening for specific pathogens is to avoid interfering effects from other
286 soil biota, which are interacting with the pathogen and its host. However, the reason
287 for low correlation between field and greenhouse studies may very well rely on such
288 interactions in the field as *A. euteiches* is sharing the root enviroment with other root

289 inhabiting fungi such as arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, which has been shown to
290 reduce different disease measures of *A. euteiches* both in the lab (Larsen and Bødker,
291 2001; Thygesen et al, 2004) and in the field (Bødker et al, 2002). Furthermore,
292 Thygesen et al (2004) showed that one AM fungus induced tolerance in the pea
293 against root rot caused by *A. euteiches*, whereas another AM fungus had no effect.
294 Another, important difference between field and greenhouse screening is the soil
295 temperature. In most greenhouse studies a soil temperature around 20 °C is most often
296 used why the screening period can be reduced to 3-4 weeks, whereas the soil
297 temperature in many pea growing areas in the pea growing period is between 5-10 °C,
298 calling for controlled experiments on the influence of soil temperature when screening
299 for resistance.

300 Recently molecular markers linked to resistance genes in pea against *A.*
301 *euteiches* have been identified (Pilet-Nayel 2002, Pilet-Nayel, 2005), which makes
302 marker assisted selection possible and as well as development of varieties with
303 multiple disease resistance (Infantino et al, 2006). Furthermore, progress in the
304 understanding of the specificity of soil borne root pathogens of grain legumes is also
305 vital for future breeding programmes (Wicker et al, 2001; Levenfors et al, 2003
306 Jensen et al, submitted).

307 Our results indicate that multiplying segregating generations under the
308 selection pressure from the natural soil pathogen population in the dirty plot will
309 select for increased tolerance/resistance. However, the composite cross which is a
310 combined crossing and selection method is time consuming and seems not to be
311 useful in the selection for resistance against specific pathogens. The method might be
312 useful as a future breeding method for different traits including stress tolerance or as
313 suggested by Murphy et al (2005) to obtain genetic variation as a mean for buffering

314 environmental fluctuations and maintaining important agronomic traits in low-input
315 and organic agriculture.

316

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388

389 **Figure legends**

390

391 **Figure 1.** Description of pea composite cross

392

393 **Figure 2.** Yield of composite cross populations with and without selection pressure
394 and average yield of parental varieties in soil with different levels of root pathogen
395 infestation in 2004 and 2005.

396

397 **Figure 3.** Root rot disease index (based on levels of yellowing of the shoot) of
398 composite cross populations with and without selection pressure and average disease
399 index of parental varieties in soil with different levels of root pathogen infestation in
400 2005.

401

402 **Figure 4.** Frequency of recombinant inbred lines with different levels of root rot
403 (based on levels of yellowing of the shoot) from composite cross populations with and
404 without selection pressure grown in soil heavily infested with *A. euteiches* in 2004
405 and 2005.

406

407 **Figure 5.** Frequency of recombinant inbred lines with different levels of root rot
408 (based on levels of root discolouring) from composite cross populations with and
409 without selection pressure tested in a greenhouse pot experiment artificially infested
410 with *A. euteiches*.

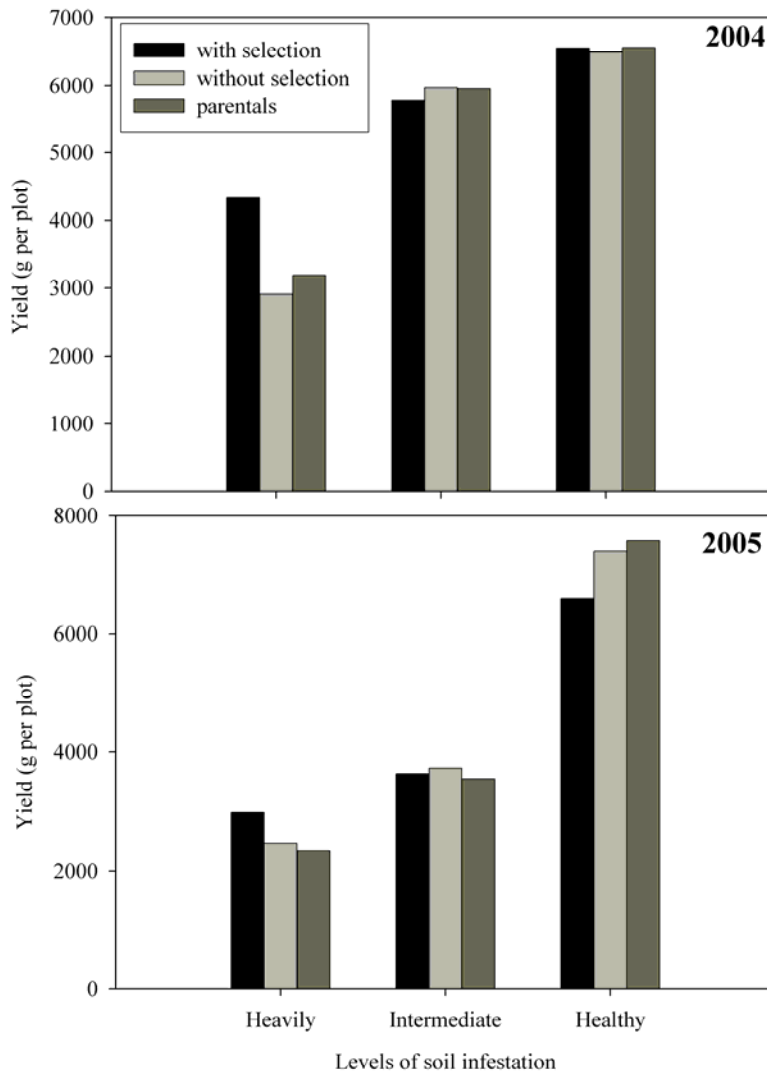
411 **Figure 6.** Frequency of recombinant inbred lines with different levels of wilt (based
412 on levels of wilting of the shoot) from composite cross populations with and without
413 selection pressure tested in a greenhouse pot experiment artificially infested with *F.*
414 *oxysporum*.

415

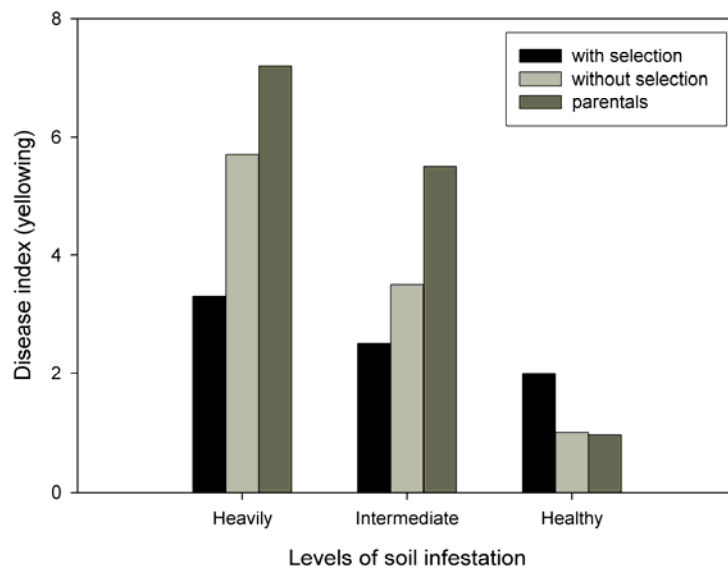
Table 1. Parental varieties of the pea composite cross and their known disease resistance against *Aphanomyces euteiches* root rot and *Fusarium oxysporum* wilt and other agronomic traits

Variety	Cotyledon	Leaf	Wilt resistance	Stem length	Aphanomyces
Loto	Yellow	Afila	+	Short, weak straw	Susceptible
86-638	Green	Normal	(+)	Short, weak straw	Tolerance in USA
Montana	Yellow	Afila	+	Short, weak straw	Susceptible
Capella	Yellow	Afila	-	Short, medium	Tolerance in Sweden
Solara	Green	Afila	+	Short, weak straw	Susceptible
LD89-2-33	Yellow	Afila	-	Short, weak straw	Susceptible
Accord	Green	Afila	+	Medium, strong	Limited tolerance
Julia	Yellow	Afila	-	Short, medium	Susceptible

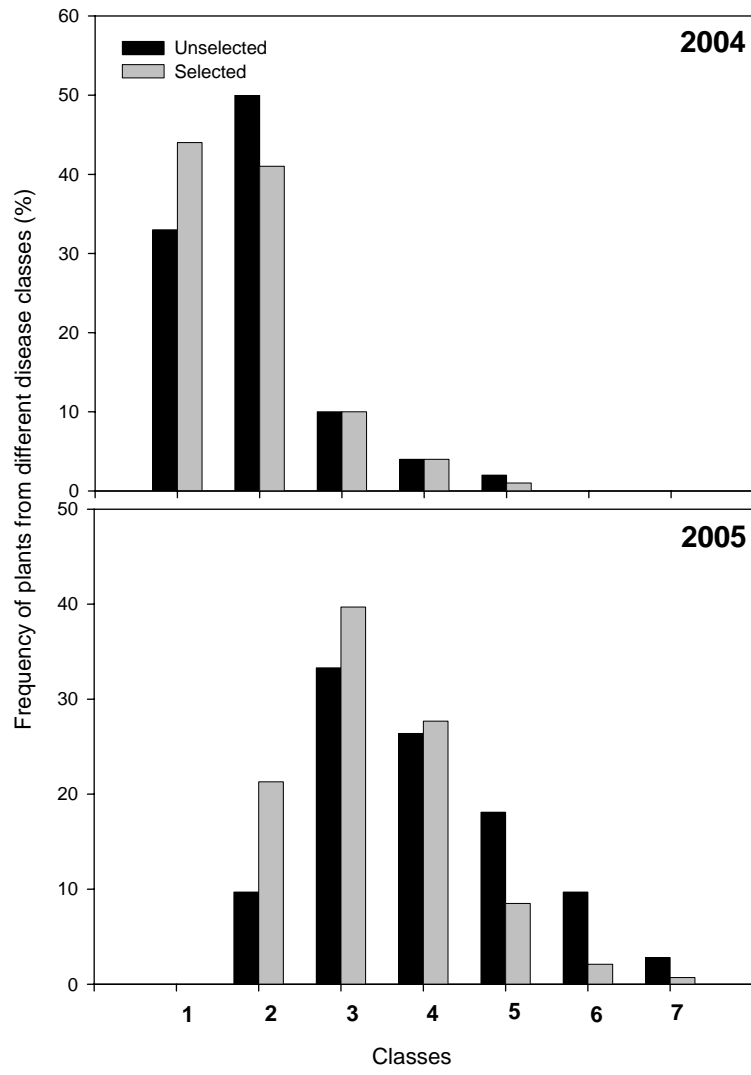
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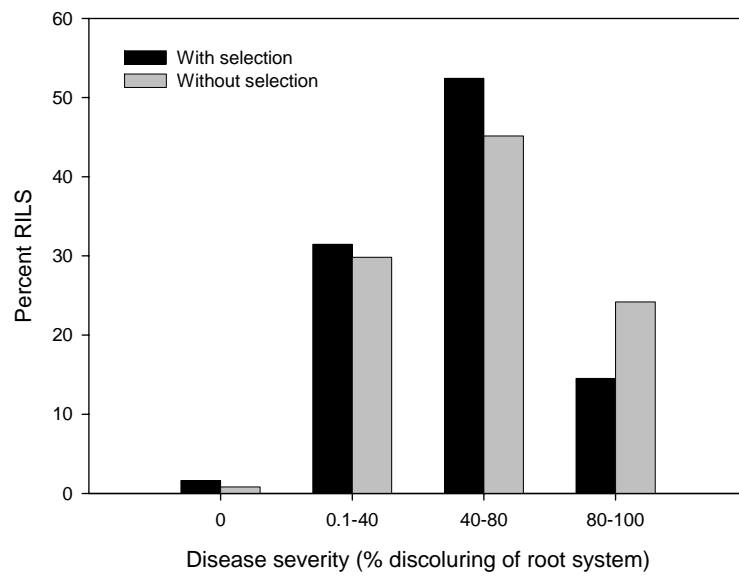
434
435
436 Figure 2



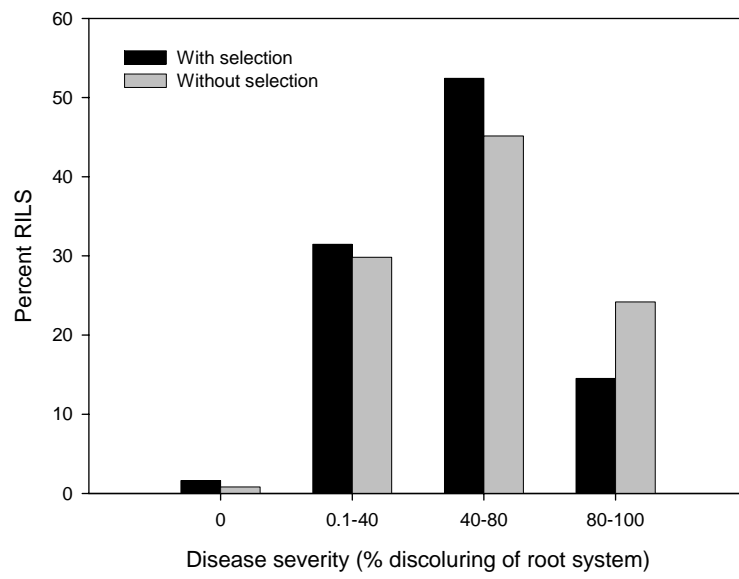
437
438 Figure 3



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440 Figure 4



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443 Figure 5



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445 Figure 6