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Olivier O. Le Gall, Laurence Svanella-Dumas, H. Fakhfakh, M. MARRAKCHI,
Thierry T. Candresse

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Disease Notes

Frequent Occurrence of *Lettuce mosaic virus* in Cape Daisy (*Osteospermum* sp.) in Tunisia

O. Le Gall and **L. Svanella-Dumas**, UMR GDPP, IBVM, INRA and Université Bordeaux 2, BP81, 33883 Villenave d'Ornon cedex, France; **H. Fakhfakh** and **M. Marrakchi**, Laboratoire de Génétique Moléculaire, Immunologie et Biotechnologie, Faculté des Sciences de Tunis, 2092 Elmanar, Tunis, Tunisia; and **T. Candresse**, UMR GDPP, IBVM, INRA and Université Bordeaux 2, BP81, 33883 Villenave d'Ornon cedex, France

The potyvirus *Lettuce mosaic virus* (LMV) is a common pathogen of lettuce crops worldwide, but it also infects other *Asteraceae* spp. including ornamentals (2,3,4). Cape daisies (*Osteospermum* sp.) are widely grown perennial ornamentals reported to be natural hosts of LMV (2,4), which causes faint leaf mosaic and sometimes mild flower breaking. A preliminary observation of mosaic symptoms prompted a large-scale survey during the spring of 2005 in Cape daisies grown in the Tunis metropolitan area and the south of Tunisia (Djerba, Medenine). Two hundred seventy-one samples (Tunis: 14 sites, 219 samples; South: 9 sites, 52 samples) were randomly collected from nurseries, roadway plantings, and home gardens and analyzed. Ninety-three samples (Tunis: 40%, South: 12%; overall: 34%) showed distinct mosaic symptoms. LMV infection was verified by immuno-tissue printing on all collected samples (1), providing evidence for even higher infection levels (Tunis: 60%; South: 25%; overall: 56%). This technique, therefore, allowed the detection of symptomless infection in a significant proportion of samples. It should however, be stressed that symptoms can be very difficult to observe in water-stressed plants, a situation frequently observed in Tunisia. Subsequent PCR analysis with LMV-specific primers (1) of a subset of 24 symptomatic and tissue-print-positive samples confirmed LMV infection in all cases. This is to our knowledge, the first report of LMV infection in Cape daisies in Tunisia. The very high rate of infection observed suggests that these popular ornamentals might constitute a reservoir of LMV as previously reported in the United States (4).

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