

## Going Back to Chickpea and its Symbionts: A Review

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### Abstract

Chickpea, *Cicer arietinum* L., is an inexpensive, important, old and worldwide pulse crop consumed widely, with two distinct cultivated types of cultivar Desi and Kabuli. Chickpea is grown in over 50 countries across the Indian subcontinent, North Africa, the Middle East, southern Europe, the Americas, Australia and China. It is a good source of carbohydrates and protein, together constituting about 80% of the total dry seed mass. Chickpea consumption is reported to have several positive physiological and health benefits and might reduce the risk of chronic diseases and optimize health.

Therefore, chickpeas could potentially be considered as a 'functional food' in addition to their accepted role of providing proteins and fiber. During the past two decades, rhizobial diversity associated with chickpea has been studied extensively in several countries, in Europe, Asia, and Oceania to elaborate the impact on the sustainable qualitative and quantitative yield of chickpea. To date, *Mesorhizobium ciceri*, *M. mediterraneum*, *M. muleiense* and *M. wenxiniae* have been described to accommodate the rhizobial strains originally isolated from chickpea root nodules. In addition, several *Mesorhizobium* species, i.e., *M. amorphae*, *M. loti*, *M. tianshanense*, *M. oportunistum*, *M. abyssinicae* and *M. shonense* were reported as additional potential symbionts of chickpea after lateral gene transfer acquisition of symbiovar *ciceri* gene set. *M. ciceri* and *M. mediterraneum* are ubiquitous in most of the countries and widely studied in the Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Tunisia and India; however, none of them were found

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M. muleiense and M. wexxiniae except in Xinjiang and Gansu Provinces Northwest China. The geographic distribution of the chickpea varieties suggested that during the introduction of chickpea from one region to another, the seeds might contain some chickpea rhizobia during the harvest or it had been inoculated with chickpea rhizobia after introduction. Chickpea rhizobial inoculation could improve the nitrogen fixation and plant growth and finally increase the yield and nutrient content of chickpea seed

**Keywords:** Chickpea; Cultivation; Rhizobia; Inoculation; Health; Distribution

## INTRODUCTION

### Primary 1 Rationale of chickpea

1.1 The origin of chickpea, types and distribution Chickpea, *Cicer arietinum* L., belongs to the genus *Cicer*, tribe *Cicereae*, family *Fabaceae*, and subfamily *Papilionaceae* (Singh and Diwakar 1995). It is an old world pulse and the second most important legume crop consumed worldwide (Ladizinsky 1975; Iqbal et al. 2010). The name *Cicer* is of Latin origin, derived from the Greek word 'kikus' meaning force or strength (Singh and Diwakar 1995). The word *arietinum* is also Latin, translated from the Greek 'krios', another name for both ram and chickpea (Singh and Diwakar 1995). Chickpea is also called garbanzo (Spanish), pois chiche (French), kichar or chicher (German), chana (Hindi), and gram or Bengal gram (English) (Singh and Diwakar 1995). In Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Afghanistan, and adjacent parts of Russia, chickpea is called 'nakhut' or 'nohut' (Vander Maesen 1987). Carbonized seeds of chickpea that have been unearthed in various archeological sites throughout the Middle East. The Middle East is also the homeland of several annual wild chickpeas, such as *C. judaicum* Boiss., *C. pinnatifidum* Jaub et Spach, and *C. bijugum* Rech which are apparently unrelated to the cultivated chickpea. Another two wild species of chickpea have been found in South-East Turkey, *C. echinospermum* Davis (DAVIS, 1969) and *C. reticulatum* Ladiz. (Ladizinsky 1975).

There are two distinct types of cultivar chickpea, Desi and Kabuli are widely cultivated. Morphologically, Desi (microsperma) cultivar have pink flowers, anthocyanin pigmentation on stems with a colored and thick seed coat. The kabuli (macrosperma) cultivar have white flowers, lack of anthocyanin pigmentation on stem, white or beige-colored seeds with a ram's head shape, thin seed coat and smooth seed surface (Moreno and Cubero 1978). In addition, an intermediate typewith pea-shaped seeds of local importance is recognized in India (Jukanti et al. 2012b).

The seed weight generally ranges from 0.1 to 0.3 g and 0.2 to 0.6 g in desi and kabuli types, respectively (Frimpong et al. 2010). The desi types account for about 80-85% of the total chickpea cultivated area and are mostly grown in Asia and Africa (Pande et al. 2005). The kabuli types are largely grown in West Asia, North Africa, North America and Europe (Jukanti et al. 2012b).

Chickpea is grown in over 50 countries across the Indian subcontinent, North Africa, the Middle East, southern Europe, the Americas and Australia (Jukanti et al. 2012b). Globally, it is one of the most cultivated pulses in terms of world production, with a total production of 14.2 million t and an average yield of

0.96 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (FAO, 2014). As a cheaper source of protein, it is particularly important for low-income consumers around the world and in developing countries, where large segments of populations have limited access to food of animal origin (Ramalho Ribeiro and Portugal Melo 1990). Chickpea also cultivates well in the region where climate variability, drought and limited use of fertilizers significantly reduce productivity (Oliveira et al. 2017). India is the largest chickpea producing country, while other major chickpea producing countries include Pakistan, Turkey, Australia, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Iran, Mexico, Canada and USA (Jukanti et al. 2012b). China is another chickpea producing country from Asia, and the main planting area is Xinjiang Province, Northwest China (Zhang 98 et al. 2018b).

### 1.2 Nutritional Quality of Chickpea Seeds

Chickpea is a good source of carbohydrates and protein, together constituting about 80% of the total dry seed mass (Chibbar et al. 2010) in comparison to other pulses. Chickpea has been and is being consumed by humans since ancient times owing to its good nutritional properties (Jukanti et al. 2012b). It is mostly consumed as a seed food in several different forms, and preparations are determined by ethnic and regional factors (Ibrikci et al. 2003). In the Indian subcontinent, chickpea is split (cotyledons) as dhal and ground to make flour (besan) that is used to prepare different snacks (Chavan et al. 1986). In other parts of the world, especially in Asia and Africa, chickpea is used in stews, soups/salads and consumed in roasted, boiled, salted and fermented forms (Gecit 1991). These different forms of consumption provide consumers with valuable nutrition and potential health benefits (Jukanti et al. 2012b).

## Classification of Carbohydrates

The total carbohydrate content in chickpea is higher than pulses (Table 2). Chickpea has: (i) monosaccharides- ribose, glucose, galactose and fructose (ii) disaccharides-sucrose, maltose and (iii) oligosaccharides- stachyose, ciceritol, raffinose and verbascose (Han and Baik 2006). The amount of these fractions varies though not significantly, between desi and kabuli genotypes (Table 1). Mono-, Di-, and Oligosaccharides Sanchez-Mata et al. (1998) reported chickpea monosaccharide concentration for galactose (0.05 g 100-g), ribose (0.11 g 100-g), fructose (0.25 g 100-g) and glucose (0.7g 100-g). Maltose (0.6%) and sucrose (1-2%) have been reported to be the most abundant free disaccharides in chickpea (Wood and Grusak 2007).  $\alpha$ -Galactosides are the second most abundant carbohydrates in the plant kingdom after sucrose (Jones et al. 1999; Han and Baik 2006) and in chickpea they account for about 62% of total sugar

(mono-, di-, and oligosaccharides) content (Sánchez-Mata et al. 1998). The two important groups of  $\alpha$ -galactosides present in chickpea are: (i) raffinose family of oligosaccharides (RFOs) - raffinose (trisaccharide), stachyose [tetrasaccharide], and verbascose [pentasaccharide] (Han and Baik 2006) and (ii) galactosyl cyclitols - including ciceritol (Table 1)(21). Ciceritol was isolated for the first time from chickpea seeds by Quemener and Brillouet (22) and later confirmed by Bernabé et al. (1993). Ciceritol and stachyose, two important galactosides in chickpea constitutes 36-43% and 25% respectively of total sugars (mono-, di-, and oligosaccharides) in chickpea seed (Sánchez-Mata et al. 1998; Aguilera et al. 2009b). Chickpea has lower values for absolute flatulent  $\alpha$ -galactosides [1.56 g 100-g] compared to other pulses like white beans [2.46 g 100-g], lentils [2.44 g 100-g] and pinto beans [2.30 g 100-g] (Sánchez-Mata et al. 1998).

## Polysaccharides

Polysaccharides are high molecular weight monosaccharide polymers present as storage carbohydrate (e.g. starch) or as structural carbohydrates (e.g. cellulose) providing structural support (Wood and Grusak 2007). Among the storage polysaccharides, chickpea is reported to synthesize and store starch and not galactomannans (Wood and Grusak 2007). Starch is the major carbon storage reserve in pulse seeds (Chibbar et al. 2010). Starch is made up of two large glucan polymers, amylose and amylopectin, in which the glucose residues are linked by  $\alpha$ -(1 $\rightarrow$ 4) bonds to form a linear molecule and the linear molecule is branched by  $\alpha$ -(1 $\rightarrow$ 6) linkages (Chibbar et al. 2010). The amylopectin side chains are packed into different polymorphic forms in the lamellae of the starch grains: 'A' type in cereals and 'C' type in pulses. The 'C' polymorph is considered to be of intermediate type between 'A' polymorph in cereals and 'B' polymorph in tubers in packing density and structure (Chibbar et al. 2010). The content of starch varies from 41-50% of the total carbohydrates (Jambunathan and Singh 1980; Dalgetty and Baik 2003; Özer et al. 2010), with kabuli types having more soluble sugars (sucrose, glucose and fructose) compared to the desi types (Jambunathan and Singh 1980). The total starch content of chickpea seeds is reported to be  $\sim$  525 g kg<sup>-1</sup> dry matter, about 35% of total starch is considered to be resistant starch (RS) and the remaining 65% as available starch (Aguilera et al. 2009a; Aguilera et al. 2009b). Chickpea seeds have higher amylose content [30-40%] than 25% in wheat (Williams and Singh 1987; Guillon and Champ 2002). The in vitro starch digestibility values (ISDV) of chickpea vary from 37-60% (Khalil et al. 2007; Zia-Ul-Haq et al. 2007), and are higher than other pulses like black grams, lentils and kidney beans (Rehman and Shah 2005).

## Dietary Fiber

Dietary fiber (DF) is the indigestible part of plant food in the human small intestine. The dietary fibers can be classified into soluble and insoluble. Total dietary fiber content (DFC) in chickpea is 18-22 g 100-g of raw chickpea seed (Aguilera et al. 2009b; Tosh and Yada 2010) and it has higher amount of DF among pulses (Table 2). Soluble and insoluble DFC is about 4-8 and 10-18 g 100-g of raw chickpea seed respectively (Rincón et al.

1998; Dalgetty and Baik 2003). The fiber content of chickpea hulls on a dry weight basis is lower [75%] compared to lentils [87%] and peas [89%] (Dalgetty and Baik 2003). The desi types have higher total DFC and insoluble DFC compared to the kabuli types. This could be due to thicker hulls and seed coat in desi (11.5 % of total seed weight) compared to the kabuli types (only 4.3-4.4 % of total seed weight) (Rincón et al. 1998). Further, Wood et al. (2011) have reported that the thinner seed coat in kabuli types is due to thinner palisade and parenchyma layers with fewer polysaccharides.

## PROTEIN CONTENT

Among the different pulses, chickpea is reported to have higher protein bioavailability (Sánchez-Vioque et al. 1999; Yust et al. 2003). The protein content in chickpea significantly varies as percentage of the total dry seed mass before (17-22%) and after (25.3-28.9%) dehulling (Hulse 1991; Badshah et al. 2003). The differences in crude protein concentration of kabuli [K] and desi [D] types are inconsistent sometimes showing significant differences [241 g kg<sup>-1</sup> in 'K' vs 217 g kg<sup>-1</sup> in 'D'] (Singh and Jambunathan 1981) but not always [217 g kg<sup>-1</sup> in 'K' vs 215 g kg<sup>-1</sup> in 'D'] (Rincón et al. 1998). Chickpea protein quality is better than some pulse crops such as black gram [*Vigna mungo* L.], green gram [*Vigna radiata* L.] and red gram [*Cajanus cajan* L.] (Kaur et al. 2005).

## Amino Acid Profile

Chickpea contains the known 18 kinds of amino acids (Wang and Daun 2004; Alajaji and El-Adawy 2006; Wang et al. 2010) though the sulfur-rich amino acids (methionine and cystine) are limiting in pulses (Table 3). There are no significant differences in the amino acid profiles of kabuli and desi type chickpea (Wang and Daun 2004; Wang et al. 2010).

## Fat Content and Fatty Acid Profile

Total fat content in raw chickpea seeds varies from 2.70-6.48 % (51,58). Fat content of 3.40-8.83% and 2.90-7.42% in kabuli and desi type chickpea seeds respectively was reported by Wood and Grusak (Wood and Grusak 2007). The fat content in chickpea (6.04 g 100-g) is higher than the other pulses like lentil (1.06 g 100-g), red kidney bean (1.06 g 100-g), mungbean (1.15 g 100-g) and pigeonpea (1.64 g 100-g) and also cereals like wheat (1.70 g 100-g) and rice ( $\sim$  0.60 g 100-g) (USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 22 (2009). <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/>).

Chickpea is composed of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA;  $\sim$  66%), monounsaturated fatty acids ( $\sim$  19%) and  $\sim$  15% saturated fatty acids (Table 4). On average, oleic acid was higher in the kabuli types and linoleic acid was higher in the desi types (Table 4). Chickpea is relatively a good source of nutritionally important PUFA, linoleic acid (51.2 %; LA) and monounsaturated oleic acid (32.6%; OA). Chickpea has higher amounts of linoleic and oleic acid compared to other edible pulses like lentils (44.4% LA; 20.9 OA), pea (45.6 LA; 23.2 OA) and bean 46.7% LA; 28.1% OA) (Wang and Daun 2004).

Linoleic acid is the dominant fatty acid in chickpea followed by oleic and palmitic acids (Table 4).

#### Minerals and Vitamins

Chickpea, like other pulses, not only brings variety to the cereal-based daily diet of millions of people in Asia and Africa, but also provides essential vitamins and minerals (Duhan et al. 1998; Cabrera et al. 2003). Raw chickpea seed (100 g) on average provides about 5.0 mg 100-g of iron, 4.1 mg 100-g of zinc, 138 mg 100-g of magnesium and 160 mg 100-g of calcium. About 100 g of chickpea seed can meet daily dietary requirements of iron (1.05 mg/day in males and 1.46 mg/day in females) and zinc (4.2 mg/day and 3.0 mg/day) and 200 g can meet that of magnesium (260 mg/day and 220 mg/day) (FAO 2002). There were no significant differences between the kabuli and desi genotypes except for calcium, with desi types having a higher content than kabuli types (Quinteros et al. 2001; Wang and Daun 2004). Selenium, a nutritionally important essential trace element is also found in chickpea seed [8.2 µg 100-g] (USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 22 (2009). <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/>) (Cabrera et al. 2003). Chickpea is reported to have other trace elements including aluminum [10.2 µg /g], chromium [0.12 µg/g], nickel [0.26 µg/g], lead [0.48 µg/g], and cadmium [0.01 µg/g] (Guillon and Champ 2002). Chickpea is a relatively inexpensive and good source of folic acid and tocopherols [both γ and α; Table 8] (CiFtci et al. 2010). It is a relatively good source of folic acid coupled with more modest amounts of water soluble vitamins like riboflavin (B2), panthothenic acid (B5) and pyridoxine (B6), and these levels are similar or higher than that observed in other pulses [Table 9](ska and Szefer 2006).

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