**Foliar application of micronutrient and plant growth regulator to reduce fruit drop and enhance yield in bael (*Aegle marmelos* Correa) cv. NB-9**

**ABSTRACT**

 The present experiment was carried out in the Main Experiment Station, Department of Fruit Science, Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology, Kumarganj, Ayodhya (U.P.), India, during 2023-2024 on the 20 years old plant of bael which were maintained properly. There were eight treatments along with one control (T1- Control, T2- Boric acid @1.0%, T3- CuSO4 @0.8%, T4- NAA @20 ppm, T5- Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8%, T6- Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm, T7- CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm, T8- Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm), replicated thrice in Randomized Block Design. Single plant was used as a Unit. First spray was done at fruit setting stage and second spray after two month of first spray. From the present investigation it is found that the foliar application of Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm proved to the most effective treatment for reduction in fruit drop (28.89 %), increase in fruit set (54.17 %) and fruit retention (71.11%) as well as yield (85.33 kg/plant and 145.31 q/ha) was also influenced by the combined spray of Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm in bael cv Narendra Bael-9

**Key Words:** Fruit Drop, Fruit Set, Fruit retention, Micronutrient, NAA

**INTRODUCTION**

Bael (*Aegle marmelos* Correa) is a significant sub-tropical fruit tree native to India. It belongs to the Rutaceae family. Bael is also known as golden apple, Indian quince and Bengal quince. As per Hindu traditions, the leaves of the bael tree are considered sacred and offered to the Lord Shiva. The bael tree is mentioned in the Yajur Veda with traced to Vedic times (2000 B.C.–800 B.C.). In the period of the ‘Ramayana’ the bael fruit was known and its trees were reported to be growing in ‘Chitrakuta’ hills and ‘Panchvati’. It has great mythological and religious significance in Indian History, Culture and Indian subcontinent, known since prehistoric time and the fruit is mentioned in the ancient Indian literature i.e., Vedas, Ramayana, Upvan Vinod and Brihat Samhita (Pandey et al., 2020). The bael is cultivated in various parts of South East Asia including India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Burma, Bangladesh, Thailand etc. In India, the bael tree is planted near temple of the Lord Shiva. Bael is widely grown in Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttrakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and in southern states of India. About 650 hectares area is under bael plantations in Tarai west and Amangardh range of forest division of Uttarakhand (Anonymous, 2020-21). All over India, Orissa shares 55.31

Per cent production which is maximum in the country followed by Jharkhand with 40.76 per cent of fruit production (Anonymous, 2020-21).

The ripe bael fruit is most nutritious and provide abundant of vitamins and minerals. It is rich source of moisture 61.06%, Energy 138 Kcal, Fiber 4.80%, Vitamin B2 1200 mg, Vitamin B1 13.0 mg, Vitamin A 55 µg, Vitamin C 7.5-8.0 mg/100g and 28-39 % total soluble solids (TSS), Protein 3.64%, Fat 0.43%, Calcium 78.0 mg, Iron 0.55mg, Phosphorus 51.60 mg, Potassium 603 mg etc. (Kaur and Kalia, 2017). It also contains marmelosin and produces 88 calories of energy per 100 g of fruit pulp. Certain biochemical constituents, namely alkaloid, coumarin and steroid have been isolated and identified from different parts of the tree. Pulp of ripe fruits is tasty and can be consumed a fresh or made into ‘Sharbat’ one of the most popular drinks in the Indian subcontinent.

 The bael tree is deciduous, hardy and has 6–8 meter height with whitish or greenish stem and with trifoliate aromatic leaves. The branches of the bael tree are usually long, shallowly furrowed, corky and having thorns. The flowers are bisexual born in cluster, sweet scented and greenish white in colour. The flowers are 2 cm wide. The calyx is shallow with 5 short, board teeth and pubescent the outside. Petal five (rarely four) which are oblong, oval, blunt, thick, pale greenish white dotted with glands. There are many stamens which may be groupted in bundles. The ovary is oblong-ovoid in shape, with a slight tapering towards the axis and a wide structure. Cells are numerous 8-20 in each ovule small and arranged in a circle pattern. The fruit is a hard shelled berry usually globose (2-8 inch diameter) with a nearly smooth pericarp. The fruit colour is mainly yellowish green having a diameter of 5.3–7.2 cm. The fruit’s pulp is yellow in colour and mucilaginous. It contains some dots on the outer surface and also contains numerous seeds which are hard and having a thread like hairs over their outer surface which is white (A. Sonawane et al., 2020). The bael fruit’s pericarp is usually 2-3 mm thick hard and filled with soft and yellow fragrant pulp. The seeds are numerous, compressed and tightly packed in layers within the cell. They are encased in tough, slimy and transparent mucilage that hardens when drying. The testa is white with wooly hairs and the embryo contain large cotyledons. It can adopt effectively to a wide range of habitat from arid, semi-arid to mesophytic conditions (Arya, Singh et. al. 1986) The bael tree can thrive in poor clay soil (Davis, 1930). The plant produces timber and is especially valuable in reforestation programme in arid and semi-arid areas and in wastelands because of its high drought tolerance and can be cultivated successfully in soils having pH range between 5- 10.

Fruit drop is the detachment of fruit from a branch of plant and fruit shedding occurs in the three distinct stages that is post- bloom drop, June drop and pre harvest drop and caused of fruit drop is probably related to competition among fruitlets for carbohydrates, water and hormones. Imbalance of auxins, cytokinins and gibberellins causes the development of abscission layer between the plant twig and fruit peduncle which leads to fruit drop (Balal et al., 2011). When the concentration of abscisic acid (ABA) increases and the concentration of auxins decreases then the plant drops its fruits (Marinho et al., 2005). Plant growth regulators have a significant impact on both fruit drop and retention in fruit trees. The extent of retention and causes of fruit drooping in bael cultivars NB- 4, NB-5, NB-7 and NB- 9 was recorded. Application of NAA resulted in significantly reduced fruit drop and fruit yield (Iqbal et al. 2009). Foliar application of micronutrients and plant growth regulators is recommended to reduce fruit drop (Modise et al., 2009).

Boron is essential for cell division and growth in the meristematic regions located near the tips of both shoots and roots in plants. It also affects sugar transport and appears to be associated with some of the functions of calcium. Boron plays a role in pollination and the development of viable seeds which in turn affect the normal development of fruit. Borex response was more positive due to boron which plays an important in translocation of carbohydrates, auxin synthesis to the sink and increased in pollen viability and fertilization (Yadav et al., 2013). A shortage of boron also causes cracking and distorted growth in fruit. Boron does not easily move around the plant and therefore the effects of deficiency appears first and are usually most acute in young tissues, growing points, root tips, young leaves and developing fruit.

Copper is vital for photosynthesis for the functioning of several enzymes in seed development and for the production of lignin which gives physical strength to shoots and stems. Copper activates many enzymes in plant and assists in chlorophyll synthesis (Ram et al., 2000).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present investigation was carried out during 2023-24 at Main Experiment Station, Department of Fruit Science and laboratory work in PG Lab, College of Horticulture & Forestry, Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology, Kumarganj, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. The plants were prune and maintained properly. All the manures, fertilizer, irrigation and culture practices as well as plant protection measures were adapted accordingly to norms. With eight treatments and three replications of each, the experiment was set up in the form of randomized block design (RBD). The bael plants were strategically spaced at distance of 8×8 m2 in the square system. Every single experiment involved three replications, with two trees designated to each replication. Micronutrient and PGR are applied two time (first spray at fruit setting in July and Second spray after two months of first spray in September). The micronutrient and plant growth regulator were purchased from online store India Mart, supplied by Aries Agro Limited, Govandi, Mumbai. Fruiting and yield attributes are observed under various parameters like- fruit set (%), fruit retention (%), fruit drop (%) and average yield of fruits (kg/tree and q/ha).

**Table 1**: Details of Treatment combinations:

Treatment Treatment combinations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| T1 | Control  |
| T2 | Boric acid @ 1.0% |
| T3 | CuSO4 @0.8% |
| T4  | NAA @20 ppm |
| T5 | Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% |
| T6 | Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm |
| T7 | CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm |
| T8 | Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm  |
|  |

**Result and Discussion**

On the basis of Impact of foliar spray of micronutrients and plant growth regulator on fruit set (%), fruit retention (%), fruit drop and fruit yield (kg/plant and q/ha) in Table 2, the results are presented here. The data derived on fruit set percent were subjected to statistical analysis. It is obvious from the foliar spray of micronutrients and plant growth regulator proved significantly effective in improving the fruit set percent. Highest fruit set percent (54.17) and fruit retention percent (71.33) was observed in T6 followed by T8 fruit set per cent (49.08) and fruit retention per cent (58.98). However, The plant under control, showed considerably lowest fruit set percent (31.42) and fruit retention percent (43.33). It was noticed that the fruit drop percentage reduced to the highest in T6 which was closely followed by T8 while highest fruit drop percent (57.00) was observed under control (T1). Fruit set percent and fruit drop percentage were influenced considerably with different nutrients as compared to control. The highest number of fruit set percentage (54.17) and minimum fruit drop percentage 28.89) were recorded by foliar spray of Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm which was followed Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm. Borax response was more positive due to boron which plays an important role in translocation of carbohydrates auxin synthesis to the sink and increased in pollen viability and fertilization. The lowest number of fruit set percent and highest number of fruit drop percentage were recorded under control (water spray). Similar results were also observed by Yadav et al., Awasthi and Lal and Ram et al. in guava. Data recorded on fruit yield kg/plant due to effect of micro-nutrients and plant growth regulator yield is present in Table No. 2 which indicate that the maximum fruit yield (85.33 kg/plant) observed with treatment T6 (Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm) followed by T8 (Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm) and minimum fruit yield was observed under Control. Similar results were also found by Tomas Zewska et al. (1970), where maximum fruit yield from plants spray with Borax and NAA.

**Table 2**: Effect of foliar application of micro-nutrients and plant growth regulator on fruiting attributes and yield parameter of bael cv. NB-9

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Treatment | Fruit set (%) | Fruit drop (%) | Fruit retention (%) |  Fruit yield |
| kg/plant | q/ha |
| T1 | 31.42 | 57.00 | 43.00 | 20.33 | 30.00 |
| T2 | 39.17 | 50.88 | 49.12 | 45.00 | 70.33 |
| T3 | 38.33 | 54.15 | 45.85 | 58.67 | 90.00 |
| T4 | 40.75 | 48.00 | 52.00 | 53.33 | 83.33 |
| T5 | 46.17 | 45.22 | 54.78 | 80.67 | 126.04 |
| T6 | 54.17 | 28.89 | 71.11 | 93.00 | 145.31 |
| T7 | 43.17 | 46.58 | 53.42 | 65.67 | 102.60 |
| T8 | 49.08 | 41.02 | 8.98 | 85.33 | 133.33 |
| SE(m) ± | 0.67 | 0.22 | 0.24 | 4.21 | 4.69 |
| C.D. @ 5 % | 2.01 | 0.67 | 0.73 | 12.76 | 14.22  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   |  |  |  |  |  |

**Conclusion**

The maximum number of fruit set, fruit retention and minimum fruit drop percentage were obtained with foliar application of Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm. However, the foliar spray Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm most effective followed by Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm for better fruit set percent, fruit retention percentage and fruit drop percentage and as well as also increase fruit yield with Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm followed by Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm. Therefore, Boric acid @1.0% + NAA @20 ppm and Boric acid @1.0% + CuSO4 @0.8% + NAA @20 ppm may be recommended to bael cv.Narendra Bael-9 growers for obtaining better yield and quality under Ayodhya region.

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