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Plant architecture and prey distribution influence foraging behavior of the predatory mite Phytoseiulus persimilis (Acari: Phytoseiidae)

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24 **Abstract** The arrangement, number, and size of plant parts may influence predator 25 foraging behavior, either directly, by altering the rate or pattern of predator movement, 26 or, indirectly, by affecting the distribution and abundance of prey. We report on the 27 effects of both plant architecture and prey distribution on foraging by the predatory mite, 28 *Phytoseiulus persimilis* Athias-Henriot (Acari: Phytoseiidae), on cucumber (*Cucumis* 29 *sativus* L.). Plants differed in leaf number (2- or 6-leafed), and there were associated 30 differences in leaf size, plant height, and relative proportions of plant parts; but all had 31 the same total surface area. The prey, the twospotted spider mite *Tetranychus urticae* 32 Koch (Acari: Tetranychidae), were distributed either on the basal leaf or on all leaves. 33 The effect of plant architecture on predator foraging behavior varied depending on prey 34 distribution. The dimensions of individual plant parts affected time allocated to moving 35 and feeding, but they did not appear to influence the frequency with which predators 36 moved among different plant parts. Overall, *P. persimilis* moved less, and fed upon prey 37 longer, on 6-leafed plants with prey on all leaves than on plants representing other 38 treatment combinations. Our findings suggest that both plant architecture and pattern of 39 prey distribution should be considered, along with other factors such as herbivore-40 induced plant volatiles, in augmentative biological control programs.

41

42 **Keywords** Plant architecture; prey distribution; predator foraging behavior; *Tetranychus* 43 *urticae*; *Phytoseiulus persimilis*; biological control

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50 **Introduction**

51 Foraging efficiency in predators and parasitoids is determined by multiple behaviors 52 associated with finding and handling prey or hosts (Vinson 1984; O'Brien et al. 1990). 53 Environmental factors, including the host plant, have an important effect on how natural 54 enemies forage. Host plant effects are mediated by both phytochemical cues and physical 55 structures (Price et al. 1980; Boethel and Eikenbary 1986; Cortesero et al. 2000). 56 Phytochemicals may be released in response to infestation, thus serving as cues for 57 natural enemies while searching for hosts/prey. For example, in phytoseiid mites foraging 58 behavior is modified by herbivore-induced plant volatiles, both in and out of prey patches 59 (Dicke and Sabelis 1988; Dicke 1994; Maeda and Takabayashi 2001). Whether or not 60 plant chemical cues are present, physical structures associated with the plant, broadly 61 described as plant architecture, are known to play a significant role in local foraging 62 behavior (e.g., Thorpe 1985; Kareiva and Sahakian 1990; Grevstad and Klepetka 1992; 63 Clark and Messina 1998a,b; Legrand and Barbosa 2003). Many definitions of plant 64 architecture have been offered (e.g., Andow and Prokrym 1990), but the one we prefer is 65 the spatial arrangement and dimensions of leaves, stems, and branches at a point in time 66 (Cloyd and Sadof 2000). Plant architectural characteristics may influence the direction 67 and rate of natural enemy search, thus affecting searching time and encounter rate with 68 prey or hosts (Legrand and Barbosa 2003; Cloyd and Sadof 2000).

91 will intensify local searching and therefore be more likely to find prey on other plant

90 have on initial prey-finding because, once prey are found on a plant, a predator generally

92 parts. Our specific objectives were to: 1) quantify the effects of plant architecture on 93 duration and pattern of movement, resting, and feeding by *P. persimilis* on and among 94 plant parts; 2) measure these same variables under different prey distributions; and 3) 95 investigate the possible interaction between plant architecture and prey distribution. We 96 specifically designed our experiment to maintain an equal total plant surface area in order 97 to focus on the impact of plant architectural features, including the sizes and proportions 98 of stems and leaves.

100 **Materials and Methods**

101

- 102 Constructing Plant Architectures
- 103

105 Inc. (Colorado Springs, CO) and sown individually into 6.25 -cm² pots containing

106 FAFARD[®] Super-Fine Germinating Mix (Conrad Fafard, Inc., Agawam, Massachusetts,

107 USA). Prior to transplanting, seedlings were watered daily and a 20-10-20 fertilizer

108 (Scotts Peters Professional General Purpose 20-10-20, Scotts Company, Marysville,

109 Ohio, USA) was applied three times a week through the irrigation system by dissolving

110 1,048 g of 20-10-20 solid fertilizer into a 75.7 l container of water, which was delivered

111 through a Hozon siphon mixer at a ratio of 1:16 (fertilizer solution:tap water).

112 Thereafter, plants were fertilized whenever watering was required. To avoid competition

113 for light, seedlings were spaced (stem center to stem center) 30 cm apart on a greenhouse

114 bench when the first true leaf was completely expanded. Depending on treatment (see

115 below), seedlings were transplanted at different times and into different sized pots.

116 To create experimental plants with different architectures, we manipulated pot 117 size and transplant date. Specifically, plants assigned to the 2-leafed treatments were 118 transplanted as seedlings into 15.2-cm diam pots when they had four true leaves fully 119 expanded. Plants assigned to the 6-leafed treatments were transplanted as seedlings into 120 10.1-cm diam pots when they had six true leaves fully expanded. The plants transplanted 121 into larger pots at an early stage became taller with larger leaves than those transplanted 122 into smaller pots later in their growth. We removed leaves (petiole and leaf blade) from

123 the taller, larger-leafed plants so that only 2 leaves remained. New growth was removed 124 from the apex of 6-leafed plants to ensure that all plants were subject to pruning; all 125 pruning was done approximately 4 days after final transplant of the 6-leafed plants. 126 We equalized total plant surface area for the two plant treatments. To attain 127 approximately the same total plant surface area but two different architectures, we 128 estimated areas for different plant parts. For the leaves (leaf blades excluding petioles), 129 we established a mathematical relationship between leaf surface area and mid-rib length 130 by scanning leaves for a range of leaf sizes and then generating a regression equation, $y =$ 131 1.091x² – 5.817x + 19.477 (R^2 = 0.99, *P*< 0.0001). The leaves were scanned using an HP 132 Scanjet 4850[®] scanner (Hewlett-Packard Company, Palo Alto, California, USA), and the 133 images were converted to surface areas with Scion Image[®] software (Scion Corporation, 134 Frederick, Maryland, USA). Based on this relationship, we created a one-way table in 135 which entering any leaf mid-rib length value would provide an estimate of leaf surface 136 area. Leaf surface areas were multiplied by a factor of two because estimated values 137 were for one side of the leaf only. To measure the surface area of stems and petioles, we 138 constructed a two-way table based on the formula of a cylinder $2*\pi*rh$ ($\pi = 3.14$, r = 139 radius of the cylinder, h = height of the cylinder). By substituting length and diameter 140 measurements for petioles and stems into the formula, we could estimate surface areas for 141 those plant parts. To measure total plant surface area, we summed the surface areas of all 142 plant parts. Differences in surface areas for total plant and plant parts between 2-leaf and 143 6-leaf plants, after alteration, were determined using t-tests (SAS Institute, Cary, North 144 Carolina, USA).

145

146 Experimental Protocols

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164 Kansas State University Museum of Entomological and Prairie Arthropod Research 165 under Lot Number 200.

166 The experiment was conducted in a laboratory at Kansas State University. All 167 treatments pertaining to plant architecture and prey distribution were repeated (see 168 below). To begin each test, we placed an adult female predator 24 to 72 h from

182 Statistical Analyses

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184 Treatments were blocked through time and 2-3 replicates of each treatment were run per 185 day for a total of 11 replicates at the end of the four-day experiment. The experimental 186 design was a 2 x 2 factorial with two plant architectures (2-leafed and 6-leafed) and two 187 prey distributions (basal leaf only or all leaves). Predator behavioral data were organized 188 for analysis into the following categories: 1) time spent moving and resting on the stem 189 before moving onto a petiole, and moving and resting on the petiole before moving onto a 190 leaf; 2) total time spent moving, resting and feeding on either plant stems, petioles or 191 leaves; 3) total time spent moving and resting on the entire plant; 4) percentage of time

192 spent resting, moving and feeding on either stems, petioles or leaves; 5) percentage of 193 predators that were able to find the first petiole, infested leaf and prey patch; and 6) 194 sequence and probability of predators moving from one plant part to another. To test 195 whether the presence of prey influenced predator behavior, either before or after reaching 196 an infested leaf, we combined behavioral data for leaves within and among plants based 197 on whether or not the leaves were infested with spider mites. The effects of plant 198 architecture, prey distribution, and their interaction were tested using Friedman's 199 ANOVA (SAS Institute 2002) when comparing predator time allocation among different 200 behavioral variables and different plant parts; and ANOVA PROC GLM (SAS Institute 201 2002) when comparing the same behavioral variable across treatments. ANCOVA (SAS 202 Institute 2002) was carried out to test whether or not plant architecture (petiole length) 203 and prey presence could affect the transit time of *P. persimilis* from petiole to leaf. The 204 frequency distribution of *P. persimilis* movement from one part of the plant to another, 205 and the success of the predators in finding prey, were analyzed by Fisher's Chi-square 206 test (SAS Institute 2002). When comparing only two levels of a treatment factor for one 207 dependent response, a t-test was used (SAS Institute 2002). 208

209 **Results**

210

211 Plant Characteristics

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213 The total plant surface areas were approximately the same for 2- and 6-leafed plants, as

214 designed. However, the surface areas of individual plant parts were significantly

215 different between the two plant architectures (Table 1). For example, 2-leafed plants had 216 longer stems and petioles, and a mean leaf blade surface area that was nearly 3-fold 217 greater than those of 6-leaf plants. Two-leaf plants also had longer internodes, thicker 218 stems and petioles, and were taller than 6-leafed plants. Although 2-leafed plants had 219 fewer internodes, they were taller than 6-leafed plants because the distance from the base 220 to the first internode was longer on 2-leafed plants. 221 222 Effects of Plant Architecture and Prey Distribution 223 224 Regardless of plant architecture or prey distribution, *P. persimilis* spent significantly 225 more time moving $(13.78 \pm 0.48 \text{ min}$ [mean \pm SE]) than resting $(3.78 \pm 0.41 \text{ min})$ or 226 feeding $(2.38 \pm 0.46 \text{ min})$ (Friedman's ANOVA, χ^2 = 80.38, *df* = 2, *P* < 0.0001). In 227 addition, after release onto the stem, all predators walked upward and moved onto a 228 petiole. Fifty percent $(22/44; \text{ range: } 36 - 64\%)$ of the predators turned onto the first 229 (most basal) petiole encountered. Regardless of which petiole was first visited, most 230 (84% [37/44]; range: 73 -100%) moved from the petiole onto the corresponding leaf 231 blade. A much lower percentage (13% [6/44]; range: 0 - 27%) of the predators moved 232 back to a stem, and only one predator stayed on the petiole for the duration of the 233 observation period. Petiole length significantly affected transit time from petiole to leaf 234 blade, with longer petioles on 2-leafed plants associated with longer times predators spent 235 on them (ANCOVA, *F*=9.63, *df*=1, *P*=0.035); whereas presence of prey on the attached 236 leaf blades did not affect transit time (ANCOVA, *F*=1.05, *df*=1, *P*=0.311). Of those 237 predators that moved onto leaf blades, the percentages that remained there were

238 significantly affected by prey distribution (Fisher's, χ^2 = 4.65, *df* = 1, *P* = 0.048); on plants 239 with all leaves infested with prey eggs, 70% (12 of 17) stayed on the leaf compared with 240 35% (7 of 20) on plants that had prey on the basal leaf only. Once on an infested leaf, *P.* 241 *persimilis* were more successful in finding a prey patch on the smaller leaves of 6-leafed 242 plants (14 of 16) than on the larger leaves of 2-leafed plants (8 of 17) (Fisher's, χ^2 = 6.02, 243 *df*=1, *P*= 0.025). There was a trend for predators to find prey patches sooner on 6-leafed 244 (4.67 \pm 0.65 min) compared to 2-leafed plants (7.23 \pm 1.64 min), but the difference in 245 time was not significant (t test, *F*=-1.62, *df*=22, *P*= 0.119). 246 Predators spent more time (ca. 37% more for each plant part) on stems and 247 petioles of 2-leafed plants than on 6-leafed plants (ANOVA GLM, stems: $F = 7.57$, $df=1$, 248 $P = 0.010$; petioles: $F = 7.93$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.02$) (Figure 1). Most of the difference was 249 attributable to time spent moving (ANOVA GLM, stems: *F*=10.85, *df*=1, *P*=0.002; 250 petioles: *F*=4.86, *df*=1, *P*=0.033) as there were no differences in time spent resting among 251 treatments for any plant part (Table 2). Prey distribution had no effect on time spent 252 moving on stems (ANOVA GLM, *F*=0.00, *df*=1, *P*=0.975) or petioles (*F*=1.49, *df*=1, 253 *P*=0.229), nor were there any significant interactions between plant architecture and prey 254 distribution (ANOVA GLM, stems: *F*=0.28, *df*=1, *P*=0.597; petioles: *F*=0.21, *df*=1, 255 *P*=0.653) (Table 2). 256 Compared to stems and petioles, *P. persimilis* females spent considerably more 257 time moving on leaf blades, regardless of plant architecture and prey distribution

258 (Friedman's ANOVA, χ^2 = 44.88, *df* = 2, *P*<0.0001) (Figure 1). Predators appeared to

- 259 walk more slowly on leaf blades than on stems or petioles, and although stops were less
- 260 frequent, they were slightly longer (average 30 seconds) than on stem and petioles. For

283 moving was relatively shorter on stems and petioles, but longer on leaves than on 2- 284 leafed plants.

285 Two-leafed plants had thicker stems and petioles, as well as longer internodes and 286 petioles, than 6-leafed plants. Therefore, randomly-searching *P. persimilis* females 287 released at the base of a 2-leafed plant had a larger potential surface area to traverse 288 before reaching a leaf blade than they would on 6-leafed plants. The shorter time 289 predators spent on stems of 6-leafed plants may also be related to the greater frequency of 290 petioles along the stem, which would increase the rate at which petioles are encountered 291 compared to 2-leafed plants. Thus, the effects of plant architecture on predator foraging 292 were cumulative, and in general may result from multiple plant structures, ranging from 293 surface area and microstructural influences to those pertaining to large structural 294 differences such as numbers, kinds and proportions of plant parts. 295 Other studies indicate there may be an inverse relationship between total plant 296 surface area and foraging efficiency for very small natural enemies (Burbutis and Koepke 297 1981; Treacy et al. 1986; Maini et al. 1991; Geitzenauer and Bernays 1996; Wang et al. 298 1997; Cloyd and Sadof 2000). Our study demonstrates that variation in foraging 299 efficiency is not necessarily related to variation in total surface area. That is, although 300 the total surface area of our plants was the same, we still found differences in foraging 301 behavior and efficiency because of the way the area was partitioned. For example, the 302 surface area of individual leaf blades on 2-leafed plants was about 3 times greater than

303 those of 6-leafed plants; and yet predators spent more time moving on leaf blades of 6-

304 leafed plants. This apparent contradiction may be explained by our observation that *P.*

305 *persimilis* spends relatively more time searching leaf edges compared to areas away from

306 the perimeter of the leaf; the tendency for this predator to search leaf edges also was 307 documented previously (Sabelis and Dicke 1985). Because 6-leafed plants had smaller 308 leaf blades, predators may have encountered leaf edges more frequently and, hence, spent 309 more time moving on leaves of 6-leafed plants than on the larger leaves of 2-leafed 310 cucumbers. Increased foraging activity on 6-leafed plants, combined with their smaller 311 leaf areas (which resulted in smaller distances between leaf edges and prey patches), may 312 explain why predators were more successful in finding prey patches on 6-leafed plants 313 compared to 2-leafed plants.

314 *Phytoseiulus persimilis* spent significantly more time moving on the leaf blades of 315 6-leafed plants where prey were located on just the basal leaf compared to plants in 316 which all six leaves contained prey. This difference may be due related to the likelihood 317 that predators would turn onto an infested leaf; on plants with only one infested leaf the 318 chance would be one in six, while on plants on which all leaves were infested any turn 319 would lead to prey. Because predators stop moving and spend more time feeding when 320 they encounter prey patches, when *P. persimilis* find prey patches more quickly (e.g., on 321 plants on which all leaves were infested with prey), they will allocate more time to 322 feeding. Similarly, Yasuda and Ishikawa (1999) found that the ladybird beetle, 323 *Harmonia axyridis* Pallis, spent more time feeding when aphids were distributed evenly 324 than when they were in patches; that is, more time feeding when prey were more easily 325 found. Thus, both plant architecture and prey distribution (number and leaf size) can 326 indirectly affect feeding time and, thus, prey consumption efficiency of *P. persimilis*. 327 The foraging behaviors of predaceous arthropods are important in the acquisition 328 of food and impact on prey populations. As such, understanding the factors that affect

329 foraging behavior may improve the effectiveness and efficiency of biological control 330 programs. For very small natural enemies like predatory mites and many parasitoids, 331 differences in plant architecture and prey distribution may have a profound effect on 332 foraging efficiency and, hence, their effectiveness as biological control agents (Andow 333 and Prokrym 1990; Ryoo 1996; Krips et al. 1999; Skirvin and Fenlon 2001; Stavrinides 334 and Skirvin 2003). Knowing the effects of plant architecture and prey/host distribution 335 on natural enemy behavior will allow better estimates of how many predators or 336 parasitoids to release, and where on the plant to release them, to achieve more efficient 337 and consistent biological control. However, because natural enemies perceive and use 338 plant chemicals during searches for prey/hosts (Turlings et al. 1990; Cortesero et al. 339 2000), examining how plant structure and prey distribution interact with phytochemical 340 cues will provide an opportunity for understanding natural enemy foraging in a broader 341 context. For example, with respect to *P. persimilis*, herbivore-induced plant volatiles are 342 known to modify search behavior both in and out of prey patches (Dicke and Sabelis 343 1994; Maeda and Takabayashi 2001) and in response to prey density (Nachappa et al. 344 2006). This information, when combined with our work on structural effects of cucumber 345 and *T. urticae* distribution on *P. persimilis* behavior (here and see also Gontijo et al. 346 2010), will allow better predictions of prey-finding and local and regional population 347 dynamics in this predator-prey system. 348 349

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352 **Acknowledgements**

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Table 1 Means $(\pm$ SEM) of plant part dimensions on manipulated cucumber plants, *Cucumis sativus*. Mean differences between 6- and 2-leafed plants were significant at *P* < 0.01 (ttest) except for total plant surface area $(P > 0.05)$.

Plant Type	N	Petiole diam (cm)	Petiole length (cm)	Stem diam (cm)	Base to first internode cm)	Internode length (cm)	Plant height (cm)	Leaf surface area $\text{(cm}^2)$	Total plant surface area cm^2)
6-leafed	18	0.32 ± 0.005	3.61 ± 0.06	0.86 ± 0.02	6.89 ± 0.14	0.93 ± 0.02	12.61 ± 0.26	82.98 ± 1.87	554.80 ± 10.05
2-leafed	20	0.45 ± 0.008	7.40 ± 0.09	1.04 ± 0.02	10.50 ± 0.24	2.66 ± 0.05	15.34 ± 0.37	240.60 ± 4.11	551.91 \pm 9.90

Table 2 Treatment effects and interactions on *Phytoseiulus persimilis* moving, resting and feeding on stems, petioles and leaves.

	architecture	prey distribution		architecture*prey distribution	behavior	
F-value	P-value	F-value	P-value	F-value	P-value	
10.85	$0.002*$	0.00	0.97	0.28	0.59	Moving on stem
1.78	0.18	0.00	0.99	2.68	0.10	Resting on stem
4.86	$0.03*$	1.49	0.22	0.21	0.65	Moving on petiole
0.22	0.64	0.27	0.60	0.23	0.63	Resting on petiole
8.14	$0.006*$	1.23	0.27	3.58	0.06	Moving on leaf
0.00	0.97	1.87	0.17	0.72	0.40	Resting on leaf
3.91	$0.05*$	11.52	$0.001*$	3.45	0.07	Feeding on leaf

*Significant treatment effect or interaction at p<0.05 (ANOVA, PROC GLM)

Figure 1. Time spent moving, resting and feeding by *Phytoseiulus persimilis* on stems, petioles and leaves of 6-leafed and 2-leafed plants with either prey on single basal leaf or on all leaves.